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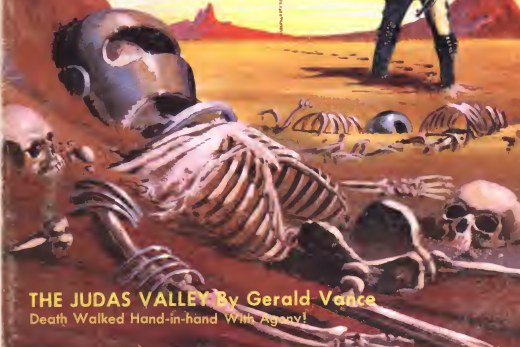
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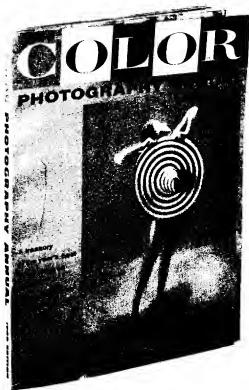
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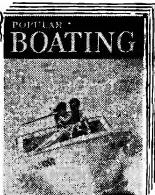
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BY THE EDITOR

• Did you buy the August issue of *Amazing Stories*? If so, was it because you saw it advertised on a bright red poster in the lobby of your local theater where they were playing a science-fiction picture called *Earth vs The Flying Saucers*?

The way the book and the picture got tied together may interest you. The idea was Lee Bergman's. He's a nice guy who earns his old age pension thinking up ways to make more people look in on movies made by Columbia Pictures.

They made this *Earth vs The Flying Saucers* opus and told Lee to go out and get some folks interested. He came to see us and said, "How about going to see the picture?" We said, "Sure, some afternoon at matinee prices." He said, "You can look for free. Be my guest." We said, "Well, thanks," and not to be outdone, told him, "Here—have a copy of *Amazing*, also for nix."

So Lee read and we looked and the posters were printed and spread around the country and we've been hoping they sold a few copies of our magazine.

About *Earth vs The Flying Saucers*—it's a pretty good picture. Not the best ever made. We think Well's *War of the Worlds* filled that niche. But *E vs TFS* could easily come in second best and that's pretty good. The special effects are almost as good as *WOTW*. In fact you may think they're better. You may even think the whole production is better.

One thing—they don't give you any time to go out for popcorn after the thing starts, so visit the washroom and the refreshment stand before you go in. You'll see Washington, D.C. clobbered, and you'll probably wonder how such convincing chaos, horror, and destruction can be synthetically created. And we're pretty sure you won't want your money back.—PWF

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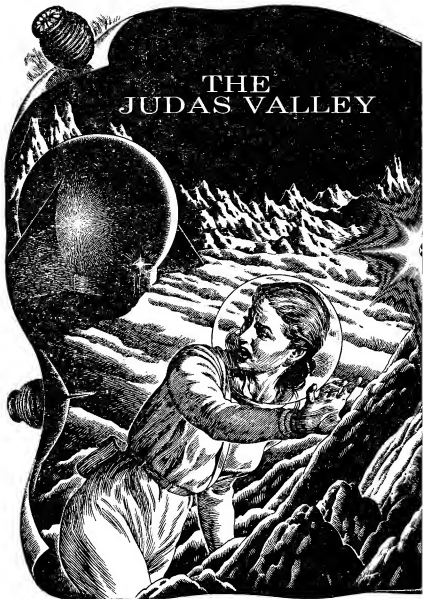


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THE JUDAS VALLEY



He had lost all sense of right or wrong. Justice and injustice



were the same, and his only thought was, kill — kill — kill!

THE JUDAS VALLEY

By GERALD VANCE

Why did everybody step off the ship in this strange valley and promptly drop dead? How could a well-equipped corps of tough spacemen become a field of rotting skeletons in this quiet world of peace and contentment? It was a mystery Peter and Sherri had to solve. If they could live long enough!

PETER WAYNE took the letter out of the machine, broke the seal, and examined it curiously. It was an official communication from the Interstellar Exploration Service. It read:

FROM: Lieutenant General Martin Scarborough, I.E.S.

TO: Captain Peter Wayne, Preliminary Survey Corps

Report immediately to this office for assignment to I.E.S. *Lord Nelson*. Full briefing will be held at 2200 hours, 14 April 2103.

By order of the
Fleet Commandant.

It was short, brief, and to the point. And it gave no information whatsoever. Peter Wayne shrugged resignedly, put the letter down on his

bed, walked over to the phone, and dialed a number.

A moment later, a girl's face appeared—blonde-haired, with high cheekbones, deep blue-green eyes, and an expression of the lips that intriguingly combined desirability and crisp military bearing.

"Lieutenant James speaking," she said formally. Then, as Wayne's image appeared on her screen, she grinned. "Hi, Pete. What's up?"

"Listen, Sherri," Wayne said quickly. "I'm going to have to cancel that date we had for tomorrow night. I just got my orders."

The girl laughed. "I was just going to call *you*, I got a fac-sheet too. Looks as though we won't see each other for a while, Pete."

"What ship are you getting?"

"The *Lord Nelson*."

It was Wayne's turn to laugh. "It looks as though we will be seeing each other. That's my ship too. We can keep our date in the briefing room."

Her face brightened. "Good! I'll see you there, then," she said. "I've got to get my gear packed."

"Okay," Wayne said. "Let's be on time, you know how General Scarborough is."

She smiled. "Don't worry, Peter. I'll be there. So long for now."

"Bye, Sherri." He cut the connection, watched the girl's face melt away into a rainbow-colored diamond of light, and turned away. There were a lot of things to do before he would be ready to leave Earth for an interstellar tour of duty.

He wondered briefly as he started to pack just what was going on. There was usually much more notice on any big jump of this order. Something special was up, he thought, as he dragged his duffle-bag out of the closet.

He was at the briefing room at 2158 on the nose. The Interstellar Exploration Service didn't much go for tardiness,

but they didn't pay extra if you got there a half-hour early. Captain Peter Wayne made it a point of being at any appointment two minutes early—no more, no less.

The room was starting to fill up, with men and women Wayne knew well, had worked with on other expeditions, had lived with since he'd joined the IES. They looked just as puzzled as he probably did, he saw; they knew they were being called in on something big, and in the IES big meant *big*.

At precisely 2200, Lieutenant General Scarborough emerged from the inner office, strode briskly up the aisle of the briefing room, and took his customary stance on the platform in front. His face looked stern, and he held his hands clasped behind his back. His royal blue uniform was neat and trim. Over his head, the second hand of the big clock whirled endlessly. In the silence of the briefing-room, it seemed to be ticking much too loudly.

The general nodded curtly and said, "Some of you are probably wondering why the order to report here wasn't more specific. There are two reasons for that. In the first place, we have reason to believe that we have found a

substantial deposit of double-nucleus beryllium.

There was a murmur of sound in the briefing room. Wayne felt his heart starting to pound; D-N beryllium *was* big. So big that a whole fleet of IES ships did nothing but search the galaxy for it, full time.

"Naturally," the general continued, "we don't want any of this information to leak out, just in case it should prove false. The prospect of enough D-N beryllium to make fusion power really cheap could cause a panic if we didn't handle it properly. The Economics Board has warned us that we'll have to proceed carefully if there actually is a big deposit on this planet."

Captain Wayne stared uneasily at Sherri James, who frowned and chewed her lip. To his left, a short, stubby private named Manetti murmured worriedly, "That means trouble. D-N beryllium always means trouble. There's a catch somewhere."

General Scarborough, on the platform, said, "There's a second reason for secrecy. I think it can better be explained by a man who has the evidence first-hand."

He paused and looked around the room. "Four

weeks ago, the Scout Ship *Mavis* came back from Fomalhaut V." There was a dead silence in the briefing room.

"Lieutenant Jervis, will you tell the crew exactly what happened on Fomalhaut V?"

Lieutenant Jervis stepped forward and took his place on the platform. He was small and wiry, with a hawk nose and piercingly intense eyes. He cleared his throat and smiled a little sheepishly.

"I've told this story so many times that it doesn't even sound real to me any more. I've told it to the Supreme Senate Space Committee, to half the top brass in the IES, and to a Board of Physicians from the Medical Department.

"As well as I can remember it, it goes something like this."

Laughter rippled through the room.

"We orbited around Fomalhaut V for a Scouting Survey," Jervis said. "The planet is hot and rocky, but it has a breathable atmosphere. The detectors showed various kinds of metals in the crust, some of them in commercially feasible concentration. But the crust is so mountainous and rocky that

there aren't very many places to land a ship.

"Then we picked up the Double-Nucleus Beryllium deposit on our detectors. Nearby, there was a small, fairly level valley, so we brought the ship down for a closer check. We wanted to make absolutely positive that it was Double-Nucleus Beryllium before we made our report."

He paused, as if arranging the story he wanted to tell in his mind, and went on. "The D-N beryllium deposit lies at the top of a fairly low mountain about five miles from the valley. We triangulated it first, and then we decided we ought to send up a party to get samples of the ore if it were at all possible.

"I was chosen to go, along with another member of the crew, a man named Lee Bellows. We left the ship at about five in the morning, and spent most of the day climbing up to the spot where we had detected the beryllium. We couldn't get a sample; the main deposit is located several feet beneath the surface of the mountaintop, and the mountain is too rough and rocky to climb without special equipment. We got less than halfway before we had to stop."

Wayne felt Sherri nudge

him, and turned to nod. He knew what she was thinking. This was where he came in; it was a job that called for a specialist, a trained mountaineer—such as Captain Peter Wayne. He frowned and turned his attention back to the man on the platform.

"We made all the readings we could," Jervis continued. "Then we headed back to our temporary base."

His face looked troubled. "When we got back, every man at the base was dead."

Silence in the room. Complete, utter, deafening silence.

"There were only nine of us in the ship," Jervis said. He was obviously still greatly affected by whatever had taken place on Fomalhaut V. "With seven of us dead, that left only Bellows and myself. We couldn't find out what had killed them. They were lying scattered over the valley floor for several yards around the ship. They looked as though they had suddenly dropped dead at whatever they were doing."

Peter Wayne made use of his extra few inches of height to glance around the briefing room. He saw row on row of tense faces—faces that reflected the same emotions he

was feeling. Space exploration was something still new and mostly unknown, and even the experienced men of IES still knew fear occasionally. The galaxy was a big place; unknown terrors lurked on planets unimaginably distant. Every now and then, something like this would come up—something to give you pause, before you ventured into space again.

"We couldn't find out what had killed them," Jervis said again. "They were lying scattered every which way, with no clues at all." The small man's fingers were trembling from relived fright. "Bellows and I were pretty scared, I'll have to admit. We couldn't find a sign of what had killed the men—they'd just—just died."

There was a quiver in his voice. It was obvious he could never take the story lightly, no matter how many times he had to tell it.

Wayne heard Private Manetti mutter, "There's always a price for D-N beryllium."

"The Scout Ship hadn't been molested," Jervis went on. "I went inside and checked it over. It was untouched, undisturbed in every way. I checked the control panel, the cabins, everything. All unbothered. The ship was

empty and dead. And—outside—

"When I came out, Bellows was dead too." He took a deep breath. "I'm afraid I panicked then. I locked myself inside the ship, set the autocontrols, and headed back to Earth at top velocity. I set the ship in an orbit around the moon and notified headquarters. I was quarantined immediately, of course, to make sure I wasn't carrying anything. The medics checked me over carefully. I wasn't and am not now carrying any virus or bacteria unknown to Terrestrial medicine.

"Since I'm the only one who knows exactly where this valley is, the general has asked me to guide the *Lord Nelson* to the exact spot. Actually, it could be found eventually with the D-N beryllium as a guide. But the *Mavis* was in orbit around Fomalhaut V for two weeks before we found the D-N beryllium deposit, and the Service feels that we shouldn't waste any time."

The lieutenant sat down, and General Scarborough resumed his place on the platform.

"That's the situation," Scarborough said bluntly. "You know the setup, now—

and I think some of you see how your specialties are going to fit into the operation. As Lieutenant Jervis pointed out, we don't know what killed the crew of the *Mavis*; therefore, we are going to take every possible precaution. As far as we know, there are no inimical life forms on Fomalhaut V—but it's possible that there are things we don't know about, such as airborne viruses that kill in a very short time. If so, then Lieutenant Jervis is immune to the virus and is not a transmitter or carrier of it.

"However, to guard against such a possibility, no one will leave the *Lord Nelson*, once it has landed, without wearing a spacesuit. The air is breathable, but we're taking no chances. Also, no one will go out alone; scouting parties will always be in pairs, with wide open communication with the ship. And at no time will more than ten percent of the ship's company be outside at any one time."

Wayne made a rough mental computation. *The Lord Nelson holds sixty. That means no more than six out at any single time. They really must be worried.*

"Aside from those orders, which were decided on by the

Service Command, you'll be under the direct orders of Colonel Nels Petersen. Colonel Petersen."

Petersen was a tall, hard-faced man with a touch of gray at his temples. He stepped forward and stared intently at the assembled crew.

"Our job is to make the preliminary preparations for getting D-N beryllium out of the crust of Fomalhaut V. We're supposed to stay alive while we do it. Therefore, our secondary job is to find out what it was that killed the scouting expedition of the *Mavis*. There are sixty of us going aboard the *Lord Nelson* tomorrow, and I'd like to have sixty aboard when we come back. Got that?"

He leaned forward, stretched upward on his toes, and smiled mechanically. "Fine. Now, you all know your jobs, but we're going to have to work together as a team. We're going to have to correlate our work so that we'll know what we're doing. So don't think we won't have anything to do during the two weeks it will take us to get to Fomalhaut V. We're going to work it as though it were a shakedown cruise. If anyone doesn't work out, he'll be replaced, even if we have to

turn around and come back to Earth. On a planet which has wiped out a whole scouting expedition, we can't afford to have any slip-ups. And that means we can't afford to have anyone aboard who doesn't know what he's doing or doesn't care. Is that clear?"

It was.

"All right," said the colonel. "Let's go out and get acquainted with the *Lord Nelson*."

The briefing session broke up well past midnight, and the group that shortly would become the crew of the *Lord Nelson* filtered out of the building and into the cool spring air. Each man had a fairly good idea of his job and each man knew the dangers involved. No one had backed out.

"What d'ye think of it, Pete?" Sherri James asked, as they left together. "Sounds pretty mean."

"I wish we knew what the answers were beforehand," Wayne said. He glanced down at Sherri. The moon was full, and its rays glinted brightly off her golden hair. "It's a risky deal, as Petersen said. Nine men go out, and eight die—of what? Just dead, that's all."

"It's the way the game

goes," Sherri said. "You knew that when you joined the corps." They turned down the main road of the IES compound and headed for the snack bar.

Wayne nodded. "I know, kid. It's a job, and it has to be done. But nobody likes to walk into an empty planet like that knowing that eight of the last nine guys who did didn't come back."

He put his arm around her and they entered the snack bar that way. Most of the other crew-members were there already; Wayne sensed the heightening tenseness on their faces.

"Two nuclear fizzes," he said to the pfc at the bar. "With all the trimmings."

"What's the matter, Captain?" said a balding, potbellied major a few stools down, who was nursing a beer. "How come the soft drinks tonight, Wayne?"

Peter grinned. "I'm in training, Major Osborne. Gotta kill the evil green horde from Rigel Seven, and I don't dare drink anything stronger than sarsaparilla."

"How about the amazon, then?" Osborne said, gesturing at Sherri. "Her too?"

"Me too," Sherri said.

Osborne stared at his beer. "You two must be in Scar-

borough's new project, then." He squinted at Peter, who nodded almost imperceptibly.

"You'll need luck," Osborne said.

"No we won't," Wayne said. "Not luck. We'll need more than just luck to pull us through."

The nuclear fizzes arrived. He began to sip it quietly. A few more members of the crew entered the snack bar. Their faces were drawn tensely.

He guzzled the drink and looked up at Sherri, who was sucking down the last of the soda. "Let's get going, Lieutenant James. The noncoms are coming, and we don't want them to make nasty remarks about us."

The *Lord Nelson* blasted off the next evening, after a frenzied day of hurried preparations. The crew of sixty filed solemnly aboard, Colonel Petersen last, and the great hatch swung closed.

There was the usual routine loudspeaker - business while everyone quickly and efficiently strapped into his acceleration cradle, and then the ship leaped skyward. It climbed rapidly, broke free of Earth's grasp, and, out past the moon, abruptly winked out of normal space into over-

drive. It would spend the next two weeks in hyperspace, short-cutting across the galaxy to Fomalhaut V.

It was a busy two weeks for everyone involved. Captain Peter Wayne, as a central part of the team, spent much of his time planning his attack. His job would be the actual climbing of the mountain where the double-nucleus beryllium was located. It wasn't going to be an easy job; the terrain was rough, the wind, according to Jervis, whipped ragingly through the hills, and the jagged peaks thrust into the air like the teeth of some mythical dragon.

Study of the three-dimensional aerial photographs taken from the *Mavis* showed that the best route was probably up through one end of the valley, through a narrow pass that led around the mountain, and up the west slope, which appeared to offer better handholds and was less perpendicular than the other sides of the mountain.

This time, the expedition would have the equipment to make the climb. There were ropes, picks, and crampons, and sets of metamagnetic boots and grapples. With metamagnetic boots, Wayne thought, they'd be able to

walk up the side of the mountain almost as easily as if it were flat.

He studied the thick, heavy soles of the boots for a moment, then set to work polishing. Wayne liked to keep his boots mirror-bright; it wasn't required, but it was a habit of his nonetheless.

He set to work vigorously. Everyone aboard the ship was working that way. Sherri James, who was in charge of the Correlation Section, had noticed the same thing the day before. Her job was to co-ordinate all the information from various members of the expedition, run them through the computers, and record them. She had been busy since blastoff, testing the computers, checking and rechecking them, being overly efficient.

"I know why we're doing it," she said. "It keeps our mind off the end of the trip. When we spend the whole day working out complicated circuits for the computers, or polishing mountain boots, or cleaning the jet tubes, it's just so we don't have to think about Fomalhaut V. It helps to concentrate on details."

Wayne nodded and said nothing. Sherri was right. There was one thought in everyone's mind: what was

the deadly secret of the valley?

There was another thought, after that:

Will we find it out in time?

After two weeks of flight through the vast blackness of interstellar space, the *Lord Nelson* came out of overdrive and set itself in an orbit around Fomalhaut V. Lieutenant Jervis, the sole survivor of the ill-fated *Mavis*, located the small valley between the giant crags that covered the planet, and the huge spherical bulk of the spaceship settled gently to the floor of the valley.

They were gathered in the central room of the ship ten minutes after the *all-clear* rang through the corridors, informing everyone that the landing had been safely accomplished. From the portholes they could see the white bones of the *Mavis's* crew lying on the reddish sand of the valley bottom.

"There they are," Jervis said quietly. "Just bones. Those were my shipmates."

Wayne saw Sherri repress a shudder. Little heaps of bones lay here and there on the sand, shining brightly in the hot sun. That was the crew of the *Mavis*—or what was left of them.

Colonel Petersen entered the room and confronted the crew. "We're here," he said. "You know the schedule from now on. No one's to leave the ship until we've made a check outside, and after that—assuming it's OK to go out—no more than six are to leave the ship at any one time."

He pointed to a row of metal magnetic tabs clinging to the wall nearest the corridor that led to the airlock. "When you go out, take one of those tabs and touch it on your suit. There are exactly six tabs. If none are there, don't go out. It's as simple as that."

Four men in spacesuits entered the room, followed by two others. The leader of the group saluted. "We're ready, sir," he said.

"Go out and get a look at the bodies," the colonel told the men, who were Medical Corpsmen. "You know the procedure. Air and sand samples too, of course."

The leader saluted again, turned, and left. Wayne watched the six spacesuited figures step one at a time to the wall, withdraw one of the metal tabs, and affix it to the outer skin of his suit. Then they went outside.

Captain Wayne and Sherri James stood by one of the

portholes and watched the six medics as they bent over the corpses outside. "I don't get it, I just don't understand," Wayne said quietly.

"What don't you get?" Sherri asked.

"Those skeletons. Those men have only been dead for two months, and they've been reduced to nothing but bones already. Even the fabric of their clothing is gone. Why? There must be something here that causes human flesh to deteriorate much faster than normal."

"It does look pretty gruesome," Sherri agreed. "I'm glad we've been ordered to keep our spacesuits on. I wouldn't want to be exposed to anything that might be out there."

"I wonder—" Wayne muttered.

"What? What's the matter?"

Wayne pointed to one figure lying on the sand. "See that? What's that over his head?"

"Why—it's a space helmet!"

"Yeah," said Wayne. "The question is: was he wearing just the helmet, or the whole suit? If he was wearing the whole suit, we're not going to be as well protected as we

thought, even with our fancy suits."

Fifteen minutes passed slowly before the medics returned, and five minutes more before they had passed through the decontamination chambers and were allowed into the ship proper. A ring of tense faces surrounded them as they made their report.

The leader, a tall, bespectacled doctor named Stevelman, was the spokesman. He shrugged when Colonel Petersen put forth the question whose answer everyone waited for.

"I don't know," the medic replied. "I don't know what killed them. There's dry bones out there, but no sign of anything that might have done it. It's pretty hard to make a quick diagnosis on a skeleton, Colonel."

"What about the one skeleton with the bubble helmet?" Peter Wayne asked. "Did you see any sign of a full suit on him?"

Stevelman shook his head. "Not a sign, sir."

Colonel Petersen turned and glanced at Lieutenant Jervis. "Do you remember what the circumstances were, Lieutenant?"

Jervis shrugged. "I don't

recall it very clearly, sir. I honestly couldn't tell you whether they were wearing suits or bubble-helmets or anything. I was too upset at the time to make careful observations."

"I understand," Petersen said.

But the medic had a different theory. He pointed at Jervis and said, "That's a point I've meant to make, Lieutenant. You're a trained space scout. Your psychological records show that you're not the sort of man given to panic or to become confused."

"Are you implying that there's something improper about my statement, Dr. Stevelman?"

The medic held up a hand. "Nothing of the sort, Lieutenant. But since you're not the sort to panic, even in such a crisis as the complete destruction of the entire crew of your scout ship, you must have been ill—partly delirious from fever. Not delirious enough to cause hallucinations, but just enough to impair your judgment."

Jervis nodded. "That is possible," he said.

"Good," said Stevelman. "I have two tentative hypotheses, then." He turned to the colonel. "Should I state them now, Colonel Petersen?"

"There's to be no secrecy aboard this ship, Doctor. I want every man and woman on the ship to know all the facts at all times."

"Very well," the medic said. "I'd suggest the deaths were caused by some unknown virus—or, perhaps, by some virulent poison that occurred occasionally, a p o i s o n o u s smog of some kind that had settled in the valley for a time and then dissipated."

Wayne frowned and shook his head. Both hypotheses made sense.

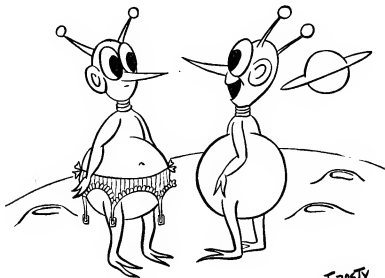
"Do you have any suggestions, Doctor?" Petersen said.

"Since we don't have any direct information about why those men died, Colonel, I can't make any definite statements. But I can offer one bit of advice to everyone: *wear your suits and be alert.*"

During the week that followed, several groups went out without suffering any ill effects. A short service was held for the eight of the *Mavis* and then the skeletons were buried in the valley.

They ran a check on the Double-Nucleus Beryllium toward the end of the week,

(Continued on page 109)



FROSTY

"I understand you've been to earth."

HEIST JOB ON THIZAR

By RANDALL GARRETT

In the future, we may discover new planets; our ships may rocket to new worlds; robots may be smarter than people. But we'll still have slick characters willing and able to turn a fast buck—even though they have to be smarter than Einstein to do it.

ANSON DRAKE sat quietly in the Flamebird Room of the Royal Gandyll Hotel, listening to the alien, but soothing strains of the native orchestra and sipping a drink. He knew perfectly well that he had no business displaying himself in public on the planet Thizar; there were influential Thizarians who held no love for a certain Earthman named Anson Drake.

It didn't particularly bother Drake; life was danger and danger was life to him, and Anson Drake was known on half a hundred planets as a man who could take care of himself.

Even so, he wouldn't have bothered to come if it had not been for the fact that Viron Belgezad was a pompous braggart.

Belgezad had already suffered at the hands of Anson Drake. Some years before, a narcotics gang had been smashed high, wide, and handsome on Thizar. Three men had died from an overdose of their own thionite drug, and fifty thousand credits of illicit gain had vanished into nowhere. The Thizarian police didn't know who had done the job, and they didn't know who had financed the ring.

But Belgezad knew that Anson Drake was the former, and Drake knew that Viron Belgezad was the latter. And each one was waiting his chance to get the other.

A week before, Drake had been relaxing happily on a beach on Seladon II, twelve light-years from Thizar,



The coronation on Thizar was a thing of vast magnificence.

reading a newsfax. He had become interested in an article which told of the sentencing of a certain lady to seven years in Seladon Prison, when his attention was attracted by another headline.

VIRON BELGEZAD BUYS ALGOL NECKLACE

Thizar (GNS)—Viron Belgezad, wealthy Thizarian financier, has purchased the fabulous Necklace of Algol, it was announced today. The necklace, made of matched Star Diamonds, is estimated to be worth more than a million credits, although the price paid by Belgezad is not known.

Such an interesting bit seemed worthy of further investigation, so Drake had immediately booked passage on the first space liner to Thizar.

And thus it was that an immaculately dressed, broad-shouldered, handsome young man sat quietly in the Flamebird Room of Thizar's flashiest hostelry surveying his surroundings with steady green eyes and wondering how he was going to get his hands on the Necklace of Algol.

The police couldn't touch

Belgezad, but Anson Drake could—and would.

"Hello, Drake," said a cold voice at his elbow.

Drake turned and looked up into the sardonically smiling face of Jomis Dobigel, the heavy-set, dark-faced Thizarian who worked with Belgezad.

"Well, well," Anson said, smiling, "if it isn't Little Bo-Peep. How is the dope business? And how is the Big Dope Himself?"

Dobigel's smile soured. "You're very funny, Earthman. But we don't like Earthmen here."

"Do sit down, Dobbie, and tell me all about it. The last I heard—which was three hours ago—the government of Thizar was perfectly happy to have me here. In fact, they were good enough to stamp my passport to prove it."

Dobigel pulled out a chair and sat down, keeping his hands beneath the table. "What are you doing here, Drake?" he asked in a cold voice.

"I couldn't help it," Drake said blandly. "I was drawn back by the memory of the natural beauties of your planet. The very thought of the fat, flabby face of old Bel-

ge zad, decorated with a bulbous nose that is renowned throughout the Galaxy, was irresistible. So here I am."

Dobigel's dark face grew even darker. "I know you, Drake. And I know why you're here. Tomorrow is the date for the Coronation of His Serenity, the Shan of Thizar."

"True," Drake agreed. "And I wouldn't miss it for all the loot in Andromeda. A celebration like that is worth traveling parsecs to see."

Dobigel leaned across the table. "Belge zad is a Noble of the Realm," he said slowly. "He'll be at the Coronation. You know he's going to wear the Necklace of Algol as well as anyone, and you—"

Suddenly, he leaned forward a little farther, his right hand stabbing out toward Drake's leg beneath the table.

But Anson Drake was ready for him. Dobigel's hand was a full three inches from Drake's thigh when a set of fingers grasped his wrist in a viselike hold. Steely fingers bit in, pressing nerves against bone. With a gasp, Dobigel opened his hand. A small, metallic cylinder dropped out.

Drake caught it with his free hand and smiled. "That's impolite, Dobbie. It isn't

proper to try to give your host an injection when he doesn't want it."

Casually, he put the cylinder against the arm which he still held and squeezed the little metal tube. There was a faint *pop!* Drake released the arm and handed back the cylinder. Dobigel's face was white.

"I imagine that was twelve-hour poison," Drake said kindly. "If you hurry, old Belge zad will give you the antidote. It will be painful, but —" He shrugged.

"And by the way, Brother Dobigel," he continued, "let me give you some advice. The next time you try to get near a victim with one of those things, don't do it by talking to him about things he already knows. It doesn't distract him enough."

Dobigel stood up, his fists clenched. "I'll get you for this, Drake." Then he turned and stalked off through the crowd.

No one had noticed the little by-play. Drake smiled seraphically and finished his drink. Dobigel was going to be uncomfortable for a while. Twelve-hour poison was a complex protein substance that could be varied in several thousand different ways,

and only an antidote made from the right variation would work for each poison. If the antidote wasn't given, the victim died within twelve hours. And even if the antidote was given, getting over poison wasn't any fun at all.

Reflecting happily on the plight of Jomis Dobigel, Anson Drake paid his bill, tipped the waiter liberally, and strolled out of the Flamebird Room and into the lobby of the Royal Gandyll Hotel. The Coronation would begin early tomorrow, and he didn't want to miss the beginning of it. The Shan's Coronation was *the* affair of Thizar.

He went over to the robot newsvender and dropped a coin in the slot. The reproducer hummed, and a freshly-printed newsfax dropped out.

He headed for the lift tube, which whisked him up to his room on the eighty-first floor. He inserted his key in the lock and pressed the button on the tip. The electronic lock opened, and the door slid into the wall. Before entering, Drake took a look at the detector on his wrist. There was no sign of anything having entered the room since he had left it. Only then did he go inside.

With one of the most pow-

erful financiers on Thizar out after his blood, there was no way of knowing what might happen, and therefore no reason to take chances.

There were some worlds where Anson Drake would no more have stayed in a public hotel than he would have jumped into an atomic furnace, especially if his enemy was a man as influential as Belgezdad. But Thizar was a civilized and reasonably well policed planet; the police were honest and the courts were just. Even Belgezdad couldn't do anything openly.

Drake locked his door, sang to himself in a pleasant baritone while he bathed, put on his pajamas, and lay down on his bed to read the paper.

It was mostly full of Coronation news. Noble So-and-So would wear such-and-such, the Archbishop would do thus-and-so. There was another item about Belgezdad; his daughter was ill and would be unable to attend. *Bloody shame, thought Drake. Too bad Belgezdad isn't sick—or dying.*

There was further mention of the Necklace of Algol; it was second only to the Crown Jewels of the Shan himself. The precautions being taken were fantastic; at a quick

guess, about half the crowd would be policemen.

The door announcer chimed. Drake sat up and punched the door TV. The screen showed the face of a girl standing at his door. Drake smiled in appreciation. She had dark brown hair, brown eyes, and a smooth, tanned complexion. It was a beautiful face, and it showed promise of having a body to match.

"Who, may I ask, is calling on a gentleman at this ungodly hour, and thus compromising her reputation and fair name?"

The girl smiled, showing even, white teeth, and her eyes sparkled, showing flickers of little golden flames against the brown. "I see I've found the right room," she said. "That voice couldn't belong to anyone but Anson Drake." Then she lowered her voice and said softly: "Let me in. I'm Norma Knight."

Drake felt a tingle of psychic electricity flow over his skin; there was a promise of danger and excitement in the air. Norma Knight was known throughout this whole sector of the Galaxy as the cleverest jewel thief the human race had ever spawned. Drake had never met her, but he had definitely heard of her.

He touched the admission

stud, and the door slid silently aside. There was no doubt about it, her body *did* match her face.

"Do come in, Norma," he said.

She stepped inside, and Drake touched the closing button. The door slid shut behind her.

She stood there for a moment, looking at him, and Drake took the opportunity to study the girl more closely. At last, she said: "So you're Anson Drake. You're even better looking than I'd heard you were. Congratulations."

"I have a good press agent," Drake said modestly. "What's on your mind?" He waved his hand at a nearby chair.

"The same thing that's on yours, I suspect," she said. "Do you have a drink to spare?"

Drake unlimbered himself from the bed, selected a bottle from the menu and dialed. The robot bellhop whirled, a chute opened in the wall, and a bottle slid out. Drake poured, handed the tumbler to the girl, and said: "This is your party; what do you have in mind?"

The girl took a sip of her drink before she answered. Then she looked up at Drake

with her deep brown eyes. "Two things. One: I have no intention or desire to compete with Anson Drake for the Necklace of Algol. Both of us might end up in jail with nothing for our pains.

"Two: I have a foolproof method for getting the necklace, but none for getting it off the planet. I think you probably have a way."

Drake nodded. "I dare say I could swing it. How does it happen that you don't have an avenue of disposal planned?"

She looked bleak for a moment. "The man who was to help me decided to back out at the last minute. He didn't know what the job was, and I wouldn't tell him because I didn't trust him."

"And you trust me?"

Her eyes were very trustful. "I've heard a lot about you, Drake, and I happen to know you never doublecross anyone unless they doublecross you first."

"Trade about is fair play, to quote an ancient maxim," Drake said, grinning. "And I am a firm believer in fair play.

"But that's neither here nor there. The point is: what do you have to offer? Why shouldn't I just pinch the gems myself and do a quick

flit across the Galaxy? That would give me all the loot."

She shook her head. "Belgezaad is on to you, you know. He knows you're here. His own private police and the Shan's own Guard will be at the Coronation to protect all that jewelry." She cocked her pretty head to one side and looked at him. "What's between you and Belgezaad, anyway?"

"I stole his toys when he was a child," said Drake, "and he hasn't trusted me since. How do you propose to get the Necklace of Algol if I can't?"

She smiled and shook her head slowly. "That would be telling. You let me take care of my part, and I'll let you take care of yours."

Drake shook his head—not so slowly. "Absolutely not. We either work together or we don't work at all."

The girl frowned in thought for a moment, and then reached into the belt pouch at her side and pulled out a square of electro-engraved plastic. She handed it to Drake.

Underneath all the flowery verbiage, it boiled down to an invitation to attend the post-Coronation reception. It was addressed to "Miss Caroline

Smith" and was signed and sealed by the Shan of Thizar himself.

"I'm 'Caroline Smith'," she said. "I've managed to get in good with the family of Belgezad, and he wangled the invitation.

"Now, the plan is this: Right after the Invocation, while the new Shan is being prepared in his special Coronation Robes, the Nobles have to change their uniforms from red to green. Belgezad will go into his suite in the Palace to change. He'll be accompanied by two guards. One will stay on the outside, the other will help Belgezad dress. I've got the room next to his, and I've managed to get the key that unlocks the door between them. I'll use this—" She pulled a small globe of metal from her belt pouch. "It's a sleep-gas bomb. It'll knock them out for at least twenty minutes. No one will come in during that time, and I'll be able to get the necklace and get out of the palace before they wake up."

"They'll know you did it," Drake pointed out. "If you're still missing when they come to, the thief's identity will be obvious."

She nodded. "That's where you come in. I'll simply go out into the garden and throw it

over the wall to you. We'll meet here afterwards."

Drake thought it over and smiled devilishly. "It sounds fine. Now let's co-ordinate everything."

They went over the whole plot again, this time with a chart of the palace to mark everything out and a time schedule was arranged. Then they toasted to success and the girl left.

When she was gone, Anson Drake smiled ruefully to himself and opened a secret compartment in his suitcase. From it, he removed a long strand of glittering jewels.

"A perfect imitation," Drake said. "And you're very pretty. It's a shame I won't be able to hang you around the neck of Belgezad in place of the real Necklace of Algol."

But his original plan had been more dangerous than the present one, and Anson Drake was always ready to desert a good plan for a better one.

Coronation Day dawned bright and clear, and the festivities began early. There were speeches and parades and dancing in the streets. A huge fleet of high-flying rockets rumbled high in the stratosphere, filling the sky with the white traceries of

their exhausts. For all of Thizar, it was a holiday, a day of rejoicing and happiness. Cheers for the Shan filled the streets, and strains of music came from the speakers of the public communications system.

Anson Drake missed most of the fun; he was too busy making plans. The day passed as he worked.

Thizar's sun began to set as the hour for the actual Crowning of the Shan approached. At the proper time, Drake was waiting in the shadows outside the palace walls. There were eyes watching him, and he knew it, but he only smiled softly to himself and waited.

"Ssssst!"

It was the girl, on the other side of the wall.

"I'm here," *w h i s p e r e d* Drake.

Something that glittered faintly in the soft light of the twin moons of Thizar arced over the wall. Drake caught it in his hands. The Necklace of Algol!

He slipped it into a small plastic box he was carrying and then glanced at the detector on his wrist. The screen showed a pale blue pip which indicated that someone was hidden in the shadows a few yards to his right.

Drake didn't even glance toward the spy. He put the plastic box containing the necklace into his belt pouch and strode away from the palace. He had, he figured, about twenty minutes.

He headed directly for the spaceship terminal. Never once did he look back, but the detector on his wrist told him that he was being closely followed. Excellent!

Inside the terminal, he went directly to the baggage lockers. He found one that was empty, inserted a coin, and opened it. From his pouch, he took a plastic box, put it in the locker, switched on the lock with his key, and strolled away.

He glanced again at his detector. He was no longer being followed by the same man; another had taken up the trail. It figured; it figured.

He went straight to the Hotel Gandyll, making sure that his tail didn't lose him. Not until they were in the lobby did he make any attempt to shake the man who was following him. He went into the bar, ordered a drink, and took a sip. He left his change and the drink on the bar and headed out the door in the direction of the men's room. Whoever was following

him wouldn't realize for a minute or two that he was leaving for good. A man doesn't usually leave change and an unfinished drink in a bar.

Drake took the lift tube up to his room, attended to some unfinished business, and waited.

Less than three minutes later, the door was opened. In walked Viron Belgezd and his lieutenant, Jomis Dobigel. Both of them looked triumphant, and they were surrounded by a squad of Royal Police.

"There he is," said Dobigel. "Arrest him!"

A police officer stepped forward. "Anson Drake, I arrest you in the name of the Shan," he said.

Drake grinned. "On what charge?"

"The theft of the Necklace of Algol."

Drake looked directly at Belgezd. "Did old Fatface here say I took it?"

"You can't talk that way," Dobigel snarled, stepping forward.

"Who says so, Ugly?"

At that, Dobigel stepped forward and threw a hard punch from his shoulder—straight at Drake's face.

It never landed. Drake side-

stepped it and brought a smashing uppercut up from his knees. It lifted Dobigel off his feet and sent him crashing back against old Belgezd, toppling them both to the floor.

The policemen had all drawn their guns, but Drake was standing placidly in the middle of the room, his hands high above his head regarding the scene calmly.

"I'll go quietly," he said. "I've got no quarrel with the police."

One of the officers led him out into the hall while the others searched his room. Belgezd was sputtering incoherently. Another policeman was trying to wake up Dobigal.

"If you're looking for the Necklace of Algol," Drake said, "you won't find it there."

The captain of the police squad said: "We know that, Mr. Drake. We are merely looking for other evidence. We already have the necklace." He reached in his belt pouch and took out a small plastic box. He opened it, disclosing a glittering rope of jewels. "You were seen depositing this in a baggage locker at the spaceship terminal. We have witnesses who saw you, and we had it re-

moved under police supervision."

Viron Belgezad smiled nastily. "This time you won't get away, Drake! Stealing anything from the palace of the Shan carries a minimum penalty of twenty years in Thizar Prison."

Drake said nothing as they took him off to the Royal Police Station and locked him in a cell.

It was late afternoon of the next day when the Prosecutor for the Shan visited Drake's cell. He was a tall, imposing man, and Drake knew him by reputation as an honest, energetic man.

"Mr. Drake," he said as he sat down in a chair in the cell, "you have refused to speak to anyone but me. I am, of course, perfectly willing to be of any assistance, but I am afraid I must warn you that any statement made to me will be used against you at the trial."

Drake leaned back in his own chair. One thing nice about Thizar, he reflected; they had comfortable jails.

"My Lord Prosecutor," he said, "I'd like to make a statement. As I understand it, Belgezad claims he was gassed, along with a police guard who was with him. When he

woke up, the necklace was gone. He didn't see his assailant."

"That is correct," said the Prosecutor.

Drake grinned. That was the way it had to be. Belgezad couldn't possibly have bribed the cop, so they both had to be gassed.

"If he didn't see his assailant, how does he know who it was?"

"You were followed from the palace by Jomis Dobigel, who saw you put the necklace into the baggage locker. There are several other witnesses to that."

Drake leaned forward. "Let me point out, my Lord Prosecutor, that the only evidence you have that I was anywhere near the palace is the word of Jomis Dobigel. And he didn't see me *inside* the palace. I was outside the wall."

The Prosecutor shrugged. "We admit the possibility of an assistant inside the walls of the palace," he said. "We are investigating that now. But even if we never find your accomplice, we have proof that you were implicated, and that is enough."

"What proof do you have?" Drake asked blandly.

"Why, the necklace itself, of course!" The Prosecutor looked as though he suspected

Drake of having taken leave of his senses.

Drake shook his head. "That necklace is mine. I can prove it. It was made for me by a respectable jeweler on Seladon II. It's a very good imitation, but it's a phoney. They aren't diamonds; they're simply well-cut crystals of titanium dioxide. Check them if you don't believe me."

The Lord Prosecutor looked dumbfounded. "But—what—why—"

Drake looked sad. "I brought it to give to my good friend, the Noble Belgezd. Of course it would be a gross insult to wear them at the Shan's Coronation, but he could wear them at other functions.

"And how does my good friend repay me? By having me arrested. My Lord Prosecutor, I am a wronged man."

The Prosecutor swallowed heavily and stood up. "The necklace has, naturally, been impounded by the police. I shall have the stones tested."

"You'll find they're phonies," Drake said. "And that means one of two things. Either they are not the ones stolen from Belgezd or else Belgezd has mortally insulted his Shan by wearing false jewels to the Coronation."

"Well! We shall see about this!" said the Lord Prosecutor.

Anson Drake, free as a lark, was packing his clothes in his hotel room when the announcer chimed. He punched the TV pickup and grinned. It was the girl.

When the door slid aside, she came in, smiling. "You got away with it, Drake! Wonderful! I don't know how you did it, but—"

"Did what?" Drake looked innocent.

"Get away with the necklace, of course! I don't know how it happened that Dobigel was there, but—"

"But, but, but," Drake said, smiling. "You don't seem to know very much at all, do you?"

"Wha—what do you mean?"

Drake put his last article of clothing in his suitcase and snapped it shut. "I'll probably be searched pretty thoroughly when I get to the spaceport," he said coolly, "but they won't find anything on an innocent man."

"Where is the necklace?" she asked in a throaty voice.

Drake pretended not to hear her. "It's a funny thing," he said. "Old Belgezd would never let the neck-

lace out of his hands except to get me. He thought he'd get it back by making sure I was followed. But he made two mistakes."

The girl put her arms around his neck. "His mistakes don't matter as long as we have the necklace, do they?"

Anson Drake was never a man to turn down an invitation like that. He held her in his arms and kissed her—long and lingeringly.

When he broke away, he went on as though nothing had happened.

"Two mistakes. The first one was thinking up such an obviously silly plot. If it were as easy to steal jewels from the palace as all that, nothing would be safe on Thizar.

"The second mistake was sending his daughter to trap me."

The girl gasped and stepped back.

"It was very foolish of you, Miss Belgezad," he went on calmly. "You see, I happened to know that the real Norma Knight was sentenced to seven years in Seladon Prison over a week ago. Unfortunately, the news hadn't reached Thizar yet. I knew from the first that the whole thing was to be a frame-up. It's

too bad that your father had to use the real necklace—it's a shame he lost it."

The girl's eyes blazed. "You—you thief! You—" She used words which no self-respecting lady is supposed to use.

Drake waited until she had finished, and then said: "Oh, no, Miss Belgezad; I'm no thief. Your father can consider the loss of that necklace as a fine for running narcotics. And you can tell him that if I catch him again, it will be worse.

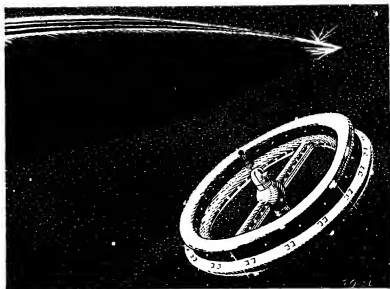
"I don't like his kind of slime, and I'll do my best to get rid of them. That's all, Miss B.; it was nice knowing you."

He walked out of the room, leaving her to stand there in helpless fury.

His phony necklace had come in handy after all; the police had thought they had the real one, so they had never bothered to check the Galactic Mail Service for a small package mailed to Seladon II. All he'd had to do was drop it into the mail chute from his room and then cool his heels in jail while the Galactic Mails got rid of the loot for him.

The Necklace of Algol would be waiting for him when he got to Seladon II.

THE END



SITTING DUCK

By SAM MOSKOWITZ

*What profiteth a man to save his life,
his job, and a billion-dollar space station
if he suffers the loss of his planet?*

"LISTEN to me, Rogers," a crisp voice crackled over the radio receiver, "there's nothing more you can do. Take the rocket sled and leave the space station. I repeat, there is nothing you can do. The space station is a sitting duck. Save your own neck."

Rogers clicked off the radio. He moved down a tubular corridor, which made up one of the spokes of the circular space station and led to the observatory.

There he manually plotted the electronic telescope onto its objective, punched the automatic tracking device

and projected the image onto a television screen.

A disk-like object came into view. For the past fifty years, the Earth had been sighting flying saucers. Up until now they had been small vessels, only suitable for observation and reconnaissance. This one was different, obviously bigger than the space station itself, and the hard words of Hillary Danton, chief of research, United Nations, echoed clearly in his mind: "They can't afford to let us get those new ships into space. With our atomic missiles we're a match for any race of creatures, no matter how advanced or how intelligent."

The space station was a dream that Rogers had been proud to have been a part of. He had been given the honor of being the first man to be placed full-time on a space station. That was twenty years ago. He was old now, but he wouldn't trade places with any man on Earth.

Oh, he had paid a price for it. The doctors had missed the symptoms, mainly because he had carefully disguised them, but the cosmic rays had taken their toll. Men had died from the effects of overexposure and he hadn't gotten off unscathed. Alien

space saucer or not, his remaining life span was short.

The radio signal was buzzing again. Hillary Danton's voice: "You've only got minutes. Get off the station. *That's an order!* It'll be the first thing they blow up."

"I get you," Rogers replied.

"Look, Man," Danton reasoned. "In a matter of hours we'll have the first anti-gravity powered space ship off the ground. If we get it out into space, we'll be a match for them. Remember. You're nothing but a sitting duck!"

"Okay! Don't get apoplexy! I told you I was leaving."

The scanner showed a dot coming in from the sunward side of the space station. Rogers didn't need a telescope to see it.

Rogers assembled the escape sled and dragged it through the air lock to the outside of the great wheel-like station, clamped it to the metallic surface, ready for use.

A huge cylindrical object swam up within hundreds of yards of the space station and established itself in the same orbit around the Earth.

A section of the ship slid open and a missile spewed forth. It passed the station and then curved towards Earth.

He ducked back into the space lock. They weren't going to destroy the space station after all. They would swing around Earth every two hours, making complete observations.

Rogers began to shiver. It wasn't fear. He was sick. This happened every time he left the interior of the station and got an extra dosage of cosmic rays through the inadequate insulation of his space suit.

A rocket seemed to burst somewhere within *him*. Abruptly he straightened up. He was running a fever—knew it—yet smiling, as he screwed his helmet tight atop his space suit and started for the air lock.

He paused a moment at a morse code attachment to the radio, for use when weather conditions were unsuitable for conversation, and pounded out a brief message. Outside, he released the magnetic grip of the sled from the surface of the station and maneuvered it to the extreme outside edge of the wheel-like structure. Then he set the full magnetic grip and the entire body of the sled slapped down onto the rounded outer edge of the wheel.

He was revolving into view of the saucer and he flattened

himself on the rocket sled. None too soon. Two grapples were protruding from the saucer, snaking themselves across the gap separating it from the station. In seconds it would be too late.

He gunned the sled. The rotation of the entire station began to speed up. Blast on! Blast off! A series of jerks on the frame. Then a long one and the station was spinning like a burning pin-wheel in an erratic, orbit-breaking wobble.

The gap between the station and the saucer closed rapidly. The saucer glowed as if aware of the danger. Rogers exhausted his remaining fuel in one burst.

The two-hundred inch telescope at Mt. Polamar filmed the outcome. Space station and cylinder, locked in an embrace of death, shot like a fiery comet from their orbits and plummeted in massive circles towards the Earth.

Two hours later, Hillary Danton, tears in his eyes, ordered the first anti-gravity ship into space.

As he gave the signal, he clutched in his hand the plastic tape deciphering Rogers' last message: "*A sitting duck is sometimes a decoy.*"

THE END

A "JOHNNY MAYHEM"
ADVENTURE

A PLACE IN THE SUN

By C. H. THAMES

Mayhem, the man of many bodies, had been given some weird assignments in his time, but saving 'The Glory of the Galaxy' wasn't difficult—it was downright impossible!

THE SOS crackled and hummed through subspace at a speed which left laggard light far behind. Since subspace distances do not coincide with normal space distances, the SOS was first picked up by a Fomalhautian freighter bound for Capella although it had been issued from a point in normal space midway between the orbit of Mercury and the sun's cornea in the solar system.

The radioman of the Fomalhautian freighter gave the distress signal to the Deck Officer, who looked at it, blinked, and bolted 'bove decks to the captain's cabin. His face



The terrible weapon



blasted death and carnage through the ship.

was very white when he reached the door and his heart pounded with excitement. As the Deck Officer crossed an electronic beam before the door a metallic voice said: "The Captain is asleep and will be disturbed for nothing but emergency priority."

Nodding, the Deck officer stuck his thumb in the whorlock of the door and entered the cabin. "Begging your pardon, sir," he cried, "but we just received an SOS from —"

The Captain stirred groggily, sat up, switched on a green night light and squinted through it at the Deck Officer. "Well, what is it? Isn't the Eye working?"

"Yes, sir. An SOS, sir. . . ."

"If we're close enough to help, subspace or normal space, take the usual steps, lieutenant. Surely you don't need me to —"

"The usual steps can't be taken, sir. Far as I can make out, that ship is doomed. She's bound on collision course for Sol, only twenty million miles out now."

"That's too bad, lieutenant," the Captain said with genuine sympathy in his voice. "I'm sorry to hear that. But what do you want me to do about it?"

"The ship, sir. The ship that

sent the SOS—hold on to your hat, sir—"

"Get to the point now, will you, young man?" the Captain growled sleepily.

"The ship which sent the SOS signal, the ship heading on collision course for Sol, is the *Glory of the Galaxy!*"

For a moment the Captain said nothing. Distantly, you could hear the hum of the subspace drive-unit and the faint whining of the stasis generator. Then the Captain bolted out of bed after unstrapping himself. In his haste he forgot the ship was in weightless deep space and went sailing, arms flailing air, across the room. The lieutenant helped him down and into his magnetic-soled shoes.

"My God," the Captain said finally. "Why did it happen? Why did it have to happen to the *Glory of the Galaxy?*"

"What are you going to do, sir?"

"I can't do anything. I won't take the responsibility. Have the radioman contact the Hub at once."

"Yes, sir."

The Glory of the Galaxy, the SOS ship heading on collision course with the sun, was making its maiden run from the assembly satellites of Earth across the inner solar system via the perihelion pas-

sage which would bring it within twenty-odd million miles of the sun, to Mars which now was on the opposite side of Sol from Earth. Aboard the gleaming new ship was the President of the Galactic Federation and his entire cabinet.

The Fomalhautian freighter's emergency message was received at the Hub of the Galaxy within moments after it had been sent, although the normal space distance was in the neighborhood of one hundred thousand light years. The message was bounced—in amazingly quick time—from office to office at the hub, cutting through the usual red tape because of its top priority. And—since none of the normal agencies at the Hub could handle it—the message finally arrived at an office which very rarely received official messages of any kind. This was the one unofficial, extra-legal office at the Hub of the Galaxy. Lacking official function, the office had no technical existence and was not to be found in any Directory of the Hub. At the moment, two young men were seated inside. Their sole job was to maintain liason with a man whose very existence was doubted by most of the

human inhabitants of the Galaxy but whose importance could not be measured by mere human standards in those early days when the Galactic League was becoming the Galactic Federation.

The name of the man with whom they maintained contact was Johnny Mayhem.

"Did you read it?" the blond man asked.

"I read it."

"If it got down here, that means they can't handle it anywhere else."

"Of course they can't. What the hell could normal slobs like them or like us do about it?"

"Nothing, I guess. But wait a minute! You don't mean you're going to send Mayhem, without asking him, without telling—"

"We can't ask him now, can we?"

"Johnny Mayhem's *elan* is at the moment speeding from Canopus to Deneb, where on the fourth planet of the Denebian system a dead body is waiting for him in cold storage. The turnover from League to Federation status of the Denebian system is causing trouble in Deneb City, so Mayhem—"

"Deneb City will probably survive without Mayhem. Well, won't it?"

"I guess so, but—"

"I know. The deal is we're supposed to tell Mayhem where he's going and what he can expect. The deal also is, every inhabited world has a body waiting for his *elan* in cold storage. But don't you think if we could talk to Mayhem now—"

"It isn't possible. He's in transit."

"Don't you think if we could talk to him now he would agree to board the *Glory of the Galaxy*?"

"How should I know? I'm not Johnny Mayhem."

"If he doesn't board her, it's certain death for all of them."

"And if he does board her, what the hell can he do about it? Besides, there isn't any dead body awaiting his *elan* on that ship or any ship. He wouldn't make a very efficacious ghost."

"But there are live people. Scores of them. Mayhem's *elan* is quite capable of possessing a living host."

"Sure. Theoretically it is. But damn it all, what would the results be? We've never tried it. It's liable to damage Mayhem. As for the host—"

"The host might die. I know it. But he'll die anyway. The whole shipload of them is heading on collision course for the sun."

"Does the SOS say why?"

"No. Maybe Mayhem can find out and do something about it."

"Yeah, maybe. That's a hell of a way to risk the life of the most important man in the Galaxy. Because if Mayhem boards that ship and can't do anything about it, he'll die with the rest of them."

"Why? We could always pluck his *elan* out again."

"If he were inhabiting a dead one. In a live body, I don't think so. The attraction would be stronger. There would be forces of cohesion—"

"That's true. Still, Mayhem's our only hope."

"I'll admit it's a job for Mayhem, but he's too important."

"Is he? Don't be a fool. What, actually, is Johnny Mayhem's importance? His importance lies in the very fact that he is expendable. His life—for the furtherance of the new Galactic Federation."

"But—"

"And the President is aboard that ship. Maybe he can't do as much for the Galaxy in the long run as Mayhem can, but don't you see, man, he's a figurehead. Right now he's the most important man in the Galaxy, and if we could talk to him I'm sure

Mayhem would agree. Mayhem would want to board that ship."

"It's funny, we've been working with Mayhem all these years and we never even met the guy."

"Would you know him if you saw him?"

"Umm-mm, I guess not. Do you think we really can halt his *clan* in subspace and divert it over to the *Glory of the Galaxy*?"

"I take it you're beginning to see things my way. And the answer to your question is yes."

"Poor Mayhem. You know, I actually feel sorry for the guy. He's had more adventures than anyone since Homer wrote the *Odyssey* and there won't ever be any rest for him."

"Stop feeling sorry for him and start hoping he succeeds."

"Yeah."

"And let's see about getting a *bead* on his clan."

The two young men walked to a tri-dim chart which took up much of the room. One of them touched a button and blue light glowed within the chart, pulsing brightly and sharply where space-sectors intersected.

"He's in C-17 now," one of the men said as a gleaming whiteness was suddenly su-

perimposed at a single point on the blue.

"Can you bead him?"

"I think so. But I still feel sorry for Mayhem. He's expecting to wake up in a cold-storage corpse on Deneb IV but instead he'll come to in a living body aboard a spaceship on collision course for the sun."

"Just hope he—"

"I know. Succeeds. I don't even want to think of the possibility he might fail."

In seconds, the gleaming white dot crawled across the surface of the tri-dim chart from sector C-17 to sector S-1.

The *Glory of the Galaxy* was now nineteen million miles out from the sun and rushing through space at a hundred miles per second, normal space drive. The *Glory of the Galaxy* thus moved a million miles closer to fiery destruction every three hours—but since the sun's gravitational force had to be added to that speed, the ship was slated to plunge into the sun's cornea in little more than twenty-four hours.

Since the ship's refrigeration units would function perfectly until the outer hull reached a temperature of eleven hundred degrees Fahrenheit, none of its passengers

knew that anything was wrong. Even the members of the crew went through all the normal motions. Only the *Glory of the Galaxy's* officers in their bright new uniforms and gold braid knew the grim truth of what awaited the gleaming two-thousand ton spaceship less than twenty-four hours away at the exact center of its perihelion passage.

Something—unidentified as yet—in all the thousands of intricate things that could go wrong on a spaceship, particularly a new one making its maiden voyage, had gone wrong. The officers were checking their catalogues and their various areas of watch meticulously—and not because their own lives were at stake. In spaceflight, your own life always is at stake. There are too many imponderables: you are, to a certain degree, expendable. The commissioned contingent aboard the *Glory of the Galaxy* was a dedicated group, hand-picked from all the officers in the solar system.

But they could find nothing. And do nothing.

Within a day, their lives along with the lives of the enlisted men aboard the *Glory of the Galaxy* and the passengers on its maiden run, would be

snuffed out in a brilliant burst of solar heat.

And the President of the Galactic Federation would die because some unknown factor had locked the controls of the spaceship, making it impossible to turn or use forward rockets against the gravitational pull of the sun.

Nineteen million miles. In normal space, a considerable distance. A hundred miles a second—a very considerable normal space speed. Increasing . . .

Ever since they had left Earth's assembly satellites, Sheila Kelly had seen a lot of a Secret Serviceman named Larry Grange, who was a member of the President's corps of bodyguards. She liked Larry, although there was nothing serious in their relationship. He was handsome and charming and she was naturally flattered with his attentions. Still, although he was older than Sheila, she sensed that he was a boy rather than a man and had the odd feeling that, faced with a real crisis, he would confirm this tragically.

It was night aboard the *Glory of the Galaxy*. Which was to say the blue-green night lights had replaced the white day lights in the com-

panionways and public rooms of the spaceship, since its ports were sealed against the fierce glare of the sun. It was hard to believe, Sheila thought, that they were only nineteen million miles from the sun. Everything was so cool—so comfortably air-conditioned. . . .

She met Larry in the Sunside Lounge, a cabaret as nice as any terran nightclub she had ever seen. There were stylistic Zodiac drawings on the walls and blue-mirrored columns supporting the roof. Like everything else aboard the *Glory of the Galaxy*, the Sunside Lounge hardly seemed to belong on a spaceship. For Sheila Kelly, though—herself a third secretary with the department of Galactic Economy—it was all very thrilling.

"Hello, Larry," she said as the Secret Serviceman joined her at their table. He was a tall young man in his late twenties with crewcut blond hair; but he sat down heavily now and did not offer Sheila his usual smile.

"Why, what on earth is the matter?" Sheila asked him.

"Nothing. I need a drink, that's all."

The drinks came. Larry gulped his and ordered another. His complete silence

baffled Sheila, who finally said:

"Surely it isn't anything I did."

"You? Don't be silly."

"Well! After the way you said that I don't know if I should be glad or not."

"Just forget it. I'm sorry, kid. I—" He reached out and touched her hand. His own hand was damp and cold.

"Going to tell me, Larry?"

"Listen. What's a guy supposed to do if he overhears something he's not supposed to overhear, and—"

"How should I know unless you tell me what you overheard? It is you you're talking about, isn't it?"

"Yeah. I was going off duty, walking by officer quarters and . . . oh, forget it. I better not tell you."

"I'm a good listener, Larry."

"Look, Irish. You're a good anything — and that's the truth. You have looks and you have brains and I have a hunch through all that Emerald Isle sauciness you have a heart too. But—"

"But you don't want to tell me."

"It isn't I don't want to, but no one's supposed to know, not even the President."

"You sure make it sound mysterious."

"Just the officers. Oh, hell. I don't know. What good would it do if I told you?"

"I guess you'd just get it off your chest, that's all."

"I can't tell anyone official, Sheila. I'd have my head handed to me. But I've got to think and I've got to tell someone. I'll go crazy, just knowing and not doing anything."

"It's important, isn't it?"

Larry downed another drink quickly. It was his fourth and Sheila had never seen him take more than three or four in the course of a whole evening. "You're damned right it's important." Larry leaned forward across the postage-stamp table. A liquor-haze clouded his eyes as he said: "It's so important that unless someone does something about it, we'll all be dead inside of twenty-four hours. Only trouble is, there isn't anything anyone can do about it."

"Larry — you're a little drunk."

"I know it. I know I am. I want to be a lot drunker. What the hell can a guy do?"

"What do you know, Larry? What have you heard?"

"I know they have the President of the Galactic Federation aboard this ship and that he ought to be told the truth."

"No. I mean—"

"They sent out an SOS, kid. Controls are locked. Lifeboats don't have enough power to get us out of the sun's gravitational pull. We're all going to roast, I tell you!"

Sheila felt her heart throb wildly. Even though he was well on the way to being thoroughly drunk, Larry was telling the truth. Instinctively, she knew that—was certain of it. "What are you going to do?" she said.

He shrugged. "I guess because I can't do a damned thing I'm going to get good and drunk. That's what I'm going to do. Or maybe—who the hell knows?—maybe in one minute I'm going to jump up on this table and tell everyone what I overheard. Maybe I ought to do that, huh?"

"Larry, Larry—if it's as bad as you say, maybe you ought to think before you do anything."

"Who am I to think? I'm one of the muscle men. That's what they pay me for, isn't it?"

"Larry. You don't have to shout."

"Well, isn't it?"

"If you don't calm down I'll have to leave."

"You can sit still. You can park here all night. *I'm* leaving."

"What are you going to do?"

"Oh . . . that." Larry got up from the table. He looked suddenly green and Sheila thought it was because he had too much to drink. "You don't have to worry about that, Sheila. Not now you don't. I all of a sudden don't feel so good. Headache. Man, I never felt anything like it. Better go to my cabin and lie down. Maybe I'll wake up and find out all this was a dream, huh?"

"Do you need any help?" Sheila demanded, real concern in her voice.

"No. 'Sall right. Man, this headache really snuck up on me. Pow! Without any warning."

"Let me help you."

"No. Just leave me alone, will you?" Larry staggered off across the crowded dance floor. He drew angry glances and muttered comments as he disturbed the dancers waltzing to Carlotti's *Danube in Space*.

Why don't you admit it, Grange, Larry thought as he staggered through the companionway toward his cabin. That's what you always wanted, isn't it—a place of importance?

A place in the sun, they call it.

"You're going to get a place in the sun, all right," he mumbled aloud. "Right smack in the middle of the sun with everyone else aboard this ship!"

The humor of it amused him perversely. He smiled—but it was closer to a leer—and lunged into his cabin. What he said to Sheila was no joke. He really did have a splitting headache. It had come on suddenly and it was like no headache he had ever known. It pulsed and throbbed and beat against his temples and held red hot needles to the backs of his eyeballs, almost blinding him. It sapped all his strength, leaving him physically weak. He was barely able to close the door behind him and stagger to the shower.

An ice cold shower, he thought would help. He stripped quickly and got under the needle spray. By that time he was so weak he could barely stand.

A place in the sun, he thought . . .

Something grabbed his mind and wrenched it.

Johnny Mayhem awoke.

Awakening came slowly, as it always did. It was a rising through infinite gulfs, a rebirth for a man who had died a hundred times and might die

a thousand times more as the years piled up and became centuries. It was a spinning, whirling, flashing ascent from blackness to coruscating colors, brightness, giddiness.

And suddenly, it was over.

A needle spray of ice-cold water beat down upon him. He shuddered and reached for the water-taps, shutting them. Dripping, he climbed from the shower.

And floated up — quite weightless—toward the ceiling.

Frowning with his new and as yet unseen face, Johnny Mayhem propelled himself to the floor. He looked at his arms. He was naked—at least that much was right.

But obviously, since he was weightless, he was not on Deneb IV. During his transmigration he had been briefed for the trouble on Deneb IV. Then had a mistake been made somehow? It was always possible—but it had never happened before.

Too much precision and careful planning was involved.

Every world which had an Earthman population and a Galactic League—now, Galactic Federation — post, must have a body in cold storage, waiting for Johnny Mayhem if his services were required. No one knew when Mayhem's

services might be required. No one knew exactly under what circumstances the Galactic Federation Council, operating from the Hub of the Galaxy, might summon Mayhem. And only a very few people, including those at the Hub and the Galactic League Firstmen on civilized worlds and Observers on frontier planets, knew the precise mechanics of Mayhem's coming.

Johnny Mayhem, a bodiless sentience. Mayhem — Johnny Marlow then—who had been chased from Earth a pariah and a criminal seven years ago, who had been mortally wounded on a wild planet deep within the Sagittarian Swarm, whose life had been saved—after a fashion—by the white magic of that planet, Mayhem, doomed now to possible immortality as a bodiless sentience, an *elan*, which could occupy and activate a corpse if it had been preserved properly . . . an *elan* doomed to wander eternally because it could not remain in one body for more than a month without body and *elan* perishing. Mayhem, who had dedicated his strange, lonely life to the services of the Galactic League—now the Galactic Federation — because a normal life and normal social

relations were not possible to him . . .

It did not seem possible, Mayhem thought now, that a mistake could be made. Then—a sudden change in plans?

It had never happened before, but it was entirely possible. Something, Mayhem decided, had come up during transmigration. It was terribly important and the people at the Hub had had no opportunity to brief him on it.

But—what?

His first shock came a moment later. He walked to a mirror on the wall and approved of the strong young body which would house his sentience and then scowled. A thought inside his head said:

So this is what it's like to have schizophrenia.

What the hell was that? Mayhem thought.

I said, so this is what it's like to have schizophrenia. First the world's worst headache and then I start thinking like two different people.

Aren't you dead?

Is that supposed to be a joke, alter ego? When do the men in the white suits come?

Good Lord, this was supposed to be a dead body!

At that, the other sentience which shared the body with Mayhem snickered and lapsed

into silence. Mayhem, for his part, was astounded.

Don't get ornery now, Mayhem pleaded. I'm Johnny Mayhem. Does that mean anything to you?

Oh, sure. It means I'm dead. You inhabit dead bodies, right?

Usually. Listen—where are we?

Glory of the Galaxy—bound from Earth to Mars on perihelion.

And there's trouble?

How do you know there's trouble?

Otherwise they wouldn't have diverted me here.

We've got the president aboard. We're going to hit the sun. Then, grudgingly, Larry went into the details. When he finished he thought cynically: Now all you have to do is go outside yelling have no fear, Mayhem is here and everything will be all right, I suppose.

Mayhem didn't answer. It would be many moments yet before he could adjust to this new, unexpected situation. But in a way, he thought, it would be a boon. If he were co-inhabiting the body of a living man who belonged on the *Glory of the Galaxy*, there was no need to reveal his identity as Johnny Mayhem to anyone but his host . . .

"I tell ya," Technician First Class Ackerman Boone shouted, "the refrigeration unit's gone on the blink. You can't feel it yet, but I ought to know. I got the refrigs working full strength and we gained a couple of degrees heat. Either she's on the blink or we're too close to the sun, I tell you!"

Ackerman Boone was a big man, a veteran spacer with a squat, very strong body and arms like an orangutan. Under normal circumstances he was a very fine spacer and a good addition to any crew, but he bore an unreasonable grudge against the officer corps and would go out of his way to make them look bad in the eyes of the other enlisted men. A large crowd had gathered in the hammock-hung crew quarters of the *Glory of the Galaxy* as Boone went on in his deep, booming voice: "So I asked the skipper of the watch, I did. He got shift-eyed, like they always do. You know. He wasn't talking, but sure as my name's Ackerman Boone, something's wrong."

"What do you think it is, Acky?" one of the younger men asked.

"Well, I tell ya this: I know what it *isn't*. I checked out the refrigs three times, see, and came up with nothing. The re-

frigs are in jig order, and if I know it then you know it. So, if the refrigs are in jig order, there's only one thing it can be: we're getting too near the sun!" Boone clamped his mouth shut and stood with thick, muscular arms crossed over his barrel chest.

A young technician third class said in a strident voice, "You mean you think maybe we're plunging into the sun, Acky?"

"Well, now, I didn't say that. Did I, boy? But we *are* too close and if we are too close there's got to be a reason for it. If we stay too close too long, O.K. Then we're plunging into the sun. Right now, I dunno."

They all asked Ackerman Boone, who was an unofficial leader among them, what he was going to do. He rubbed his big fingers against the thick stubble of beard on his jaw and you could hear the rasping sound it made. Then he said, "Nothing, until we find out for sure. But I got a hunch the officers are trying to pull the wool over the eyes of them politicians we got on board. That's all right with me, men. If they want to, they got their reasons. But I tell ya this: they ain't going to pull any wool over Acky

Boone's eyes, and that's a fact."

Just then the squawk box called: "Now hear this! Now hear this! Tech/1 Ackerman Boone to Exec's office. Tech/1 Boone to Exec."

"You see?" Boone said, smiling grimly. As yet, no one saw. His face still set in a grim smile, Ackerman Boone headed above decks.

"That, Mr. President," Vice Admiral T. Shawnley Stapleton said gravely, "is the problem. We would have come to you sooner, sir, but frankly—"

"I know it, Admiral," the President said quietly. "I could not have helped you in any way. There was no sense telling me."

"We have one chance, sir, and one only. It's irregular and it will probably knock the hell out of the *Glory of the Galaxy*, but it may save our lives. If we throw the ship suddenly into subspace we could pass right through the sun's position and—"

"I'm no scientist, Admiral, but wouldn't that put tremendous stress not only on the ship but on all of us aboard?"

"It would, sir. I won't keep anything from you, of course. We'd all be subjected to a force of twenty-some gravities

for a period of several seconds. Here aboard the *Glory*, we don't have adequate G-equipment. It's something like the old days of air flight, sir: as soon as airplanes became reasonably safe, passenger ships didn't bother to carry parachutes. Result over a period of fifty years: thousands of lives lost. We'd all be bruised and battered, sir. Bones would be broken. There might be a few deaths. But I see no other way out, sir."

"Then there was no need to check with me at all, I assure you, Admiral Stapleton. Do whatever you think is best, sir."

The Admiral nodded gravely. "Thank you, Mr. President. I will say this, though: we will wait for a miracle."

"I'm afraid I don't follow you."

"Well, I don't expect a miracle, but the switchover to subspace so suddenly is bound to be dangerous. Therefore, we'll wait until the last possible moment. It will grow uncomfortably warm, let me warn you, but as long as the subspace drive is in good working order—"

"I see what you mean, Admiral. You have a free hand, sir; let me repeat that. I will not interfere in any way and I have the utmost confidence

in you." The President mopped his brow with an already damp handkerchief. It *was* growing warm, come to think of it. Uncomfortably warm.

As if everyone aboard the *Glory of the Galaxy* was slowly being broiled alive. . . .

Ackerman Boone entered the crew quarters with the same smile still on his lips. At first he said nothing, but his silence drew the men like a magnet draws iron filings. When they had all clustered about him he spoke.

"The Exec not only chewed my ears off," he boomed. "He all but spit them in my face! I was right, men. He admitted it to me after he saw how he couldn't get away with anything in front of Ackerman Boone. Men, we're heading on collision course with the sun!"

A shocked silence greeted his words and Ackerman Boone, instinctively a born speaker, paused dramatically to allow each man the private horror of his own thoughts for a few moments. Then he continued: "The Admiral figures we have one chance to get out of this alive, men. He figures—"

"What is it, Acky?"

"What will he do?"

"How will the Admiral get us out of this?"

Ackerman Boone spat on the polished, gleaming floor of the crew quarters. "He'll never get us out alive, let me tell you. He wants to shift us into subspace at the last possible minute. Suddenly. Like this—" and Ackerman Boone snapped his fingers.

"There'd be a ship full of broken bones!" someone protested. "We can't do a thing like that."

"He'll kill us all!" a very young T/3 cried hysterically.

"Not if I can help it, he won't," shouted Ackerman Boone. "Listen, men. This ain't a question of discipline. It's a question of living or dying and I tell you that's more important than doing it like the book says or discipline or anything like that. We got a chance, all right: but it ain't what the Admiral thinks it is. We ought to abandon the *Glory* to her place in the sun and scam out of here in the lifeboats—every last person aboard ship."

"But will they have enough power to get out of the sun's gravitational pull?" someone asked.

Ackerman Boone shrugged. "Don't look at me," he said mockingly. "I'm only an enlisted man and they don't give enlisted men enough math to answer questions like that.

But reckoning by the seat of my pants I would say, yes. Yes, we could get away like that—if we act fast. Because every minute we waste is a minute that brings us closer to the sun and makes it harder to get away in the lifeboats. If we act, men, we got to act fast."

"You're talking mutiny, Boone," a grizzled old space veteran said. "You can count me out."

"What's the matter, McCormick? Yellow?"

"I'm not yellow. I say it takes guts to maintain discipline in a real emergency. I say *you're* yellow, Boone."

"You better be ready to back that up with your fists, McCormick," Boone said savagely.

"I'm ready any time you're ready, you yellow mutinous bastard!"

Ackerman Boone launched himself at the smaller, older man, who stood his ground unflinchingly although he probably knew he would take a sound beating. But four or five crewmen came between them and held them apart, one saying:

"Look who's talking, Boone. You say time's precious but you're all set to start fighting. Every minute—"

"Every *second*," Boone said grimly, "brings us more than a hundred miles closer to the sun."

"What can we do, Acky?"

Instead of answer, Ackerman Boone dramatically mopped the sweat from his face. All the men were uncomfortably warm now. It was obvious that the temperature within the *Glory of the Galaxy* had now climbed fifteen or twenty degrees despite the fact that the refrigs were working at full capacity. Even the bulkheads and the metal floor of crew quarters were unpleasantly warm to the touch. The air was hot and suddenly very dry.

"I'll tell you what we ought to do," Ackerman Boone said finally. "Admiral Stapleton or no Admiral Stapleton, President of the Galactic Federation or no President of the Galactic Federation, we ought to take over this ship and man the life boats for everyone's good. If they don't want to save their lives and ours—let's us save our lives and theirs!"

Roars of approval greeted Boone's words, but Spacer McCormick and some of the other veterans stood apart from the loud speech-making which followed. Actually, Boone's wild words—which he gambled with after the first

flush of enthusiasm for his plan—began to lose converts. One by one the men drifted toward McCormick's silent group until, finally, Boone had lost almost his entire audience.

Just then a T/2 rushed into crew quarters and shouted: "Hey, is Boone around? Has anyone seen Boone?"

This brought general laughter. Under the circumstances, the question was not without its humorous aspect.

"What'll you have?" Boone demanded.

"The refrigs, Boone! They are on the blink. Overstrained themselves and burned themselves out. Inside of half an hour this ship's going to be an oven hot enough to kill us all!"

"Half an hour, men!" Ackerman Boone cried. "Now, do we take over the ship and man those lifeboats or don't we!"

The roar which followed his words was a decidedly affirmative one.

"These are the figures," Admiral Stapleton said. "You can see, Mr. President, that we have absolutely no chance whatever if we man the lifeboats. We would perish as assuredly as we would if we remained with the *Glory of the Galaxy* in normal space."

"Admiral, I have to hand it

to you. I don't know how you can think—in all this heat."

"Have to, sir. Otherwise we all die."

"The air temperature—"

"Is a hundred and thirty degrees and rising. We've passed salt tablets out to everyone, sir, but even then it's only a matter of time before we're all prostrated. If you're sure you give your permission, sir—"

"Admiral Stapleton, you are running this ship, not I."

"Very well, sir. I've sent our subspace officer, Lieutenant Ormundy, to throw in the subspace drive. We should know in a few moments—"

"No crash hammocks or anything?"

"I'm sorry, sir."

"It isn't your fault, Admiral. I was merely pointing out a fact."

The squack box blared: "Now hear this! Now hear this! T/3 Ackerman Boone to Admiral Stapleton. Are you listening, Admiral?"

Admiral Stapleton's haggard, heat-worn face bore a look of astonishment as he listened. Ackerman said, "We have Lieutenant Ormundy, Admiral. He's not killing us all by putting us into subspace in minutes when it ought to take hours, you understand. We have Ormundy and we

have the subspace room. A contingent of our men is getting the lifeboats ready. We're going to abandon ship, Admiral, all of us, including you and the politicians even if we have to drag you aboard the lifeboats at N—gunpoint."

Admiral Stapleton's face went ashen. "Let me at a radio!" he roared. "I want to answer that man and see if he understands exactly what mutiny is!"

While Ackerman Boone was talking over the squawk box, the temperature within the *Glory of the Galaxy* rose to 145° Fahrenheit.

"Fifteen minutes," Larry Grange said. "In fifteen minutes the heat will have us all unconscious." Only it wasn't Larry alone who was talking. It was Larry and Johnny Mayhem. In a surprisingly short time the young Secret Serviceman had come to accept the dual occupation of his own mind. It was there: it was either dual occupation or insanity and if the voice which spoke inside his head said it was Johnny Mayhem, then it was Johnny Mayhem. Besides, Larry felt clear-headed in a way he had never felt before, despite the terrible, sapping heat. It was as if he had matured suddenly—

the word matured came to him instinctively—in the space of minutes. Or, as if a maturing influence were at work on his mind.

"What can we do?" Sheila said. "The crew has complete control of the ship."

"Secret Service chief says we're on our own. There's no time for co-ordinated planning, but somehow, within a very few minutes, we've got to get inside the subspace room and throw the ship out of normal space or we'll all be roasted."

"Some of your men are there now, aren't they?"

"In the companionway outside the subspace room, yeah. But they'll never force their way in time. Not with blasters and not with N-guns, either. Not in ten minutes, they won't."

"Larry, all of a sudden I—I'm scared. We're all going to die, Larry. I don't want—Larry, what are you going to do?"

They had been walking in a deserted companionway which brought them to one of the aft escape hatches of the *Glory of the Galaxy*. Their clothing was plastered to their bodies with sweat and every breath was agonizing, furnace hot.

"I'm going outside," Larry said quietly.

"Outside? What do you mean?"

"Spacesuit, outside. There's a hatch in the subspace room. If their attention is diverted to the companionway door, I may be able to get in. It's our only chance—ours, and everyone's."

"But the spacesuit—"

"I know," Larry said even as he was climbing into the inflatable vacuum garment. It was Larry—and it wasn't Larry. He felt a certain confidence, a certain sense of doing the right thing—a feeling which Larry Grange had never experienced before in his life. It was as if the boy had become a man in the final moments of his life—or, he thought all at once, it was as if Johnny Mayhem who shared his mind and his body with him was somehow transmitting some of his own skills and confidence even as he—Mayhem—had reached the decision to go outside.

"I know," he said. "The spacesuit isn't insulated sufficiently. I'll have about three minutes out there. Three minutes to get inside. Otherwise, I'm finished."

"But Larry—"

"Don't you see, Sheila? What does it matter? Who wants the five or ten extra minutes if we're all going to

die anyway? This way, there's a chance."

He buckled the spacesuit and lifted the heavy fishbowl helmet, preparing to set it on his shoulders.

"Wait," Sheila said, and stood on tiptoes to take his face in her hands and kiss him on the lips. "You—you're different," Sheila said. "You're the same guy, a lot of fun, but you're a—man, too. This is for what might have been, Larry," she said, and kissed him again. "This is because I love you."

Before he dropped the helmet in place, Larry said. "It isn't for what might have been, Sheila. It's for what will be."

The helmet snapped shut over the shoulder ridges of the spacesuit. Moments later, he had slipped into the airlock.

"I say you're a fool, Ackerman Boone!" one of the enlisted men rasped at the leader of the mutiny. "I say now we've lost our last chance. Now it's too late to get into the lifeboats even if we wanted to. Now all we can do is—die!"

There were still ten conscious men in the subspace room. The others had fallen before heat prostration and lay strewn about the floor,

wringing wet and oddly flaccid as if all the moisture had been wrung from their bodies except for the sweat which covered their skins.

"All right," Ackerman Boone admitted. "All right, so none of us knows how to work the subspace mechanism. You think that would have helped? It would have killed us all, I tell you."

"It was a chance, Boone. Our last chance and you—"

"Just shut up!" Boone snarled. "I know what you're thinking. You're thinking we ought to let them officers and Secret Servicemen to ram home the subspace drive. But use your head, man. Probably they'll kill us all, but if they don't—"

"Then you admit there's a chance!"

"Yeah. All right, a chance. But if they don't kill us all, if they save us by ramming home the subspacer, what happens? We're all taken in on a mutiny charge. It's a capital offense, you fool!"

"Well, it's better than sure death," the man said, and moved toward the door.

"Allister, wait!" Boone cried. "Wait, I'm warning you. Any man who tries to open that door—"

Outside, a steady booming of blaster fire could be heard,

but the assault-proof door stood fast.

"—is going to get himself killed!" Boone finished.

Grimly, Allister reached the door and got his already blistered fingers on the lock mechanism.

Ackerman Boone shot him in the back with an N-gun.

Larry's whole body felt like one raw mass of broken blisters as, flat on his belly, he inched his way along the outside hull of the *Glory of the Galaxy*. He had no idea what the heat was out here, but it radiated off the hot hull of the *Glory* in scalding, suffocating waves which swept right through the insulining of the spacesuit. If he didn't find the proper hatch, and in a matter of seconds . . .

"Anyone else?" Ackerman Boone screamed. "Anyone else like Allister?"

But one by one the remaining men were dropping from the heat. Finally—alone—Ackerman Boone faced the door and stared defiantly at the hot metal as if he could see his adversaries through it. On the other side, the firing became more sporadic as the officers and Secret Servicemen collapsed. His mind crazed with the heat and with fear,

Ackerman Boone suddenly wished he could see the men through the door, wished he could see them die . . .

It was this hatch or nothing. He thought it was the right one, but couldn't be sure. He could no longer see. His vision had gone completely. The pain was a numb thing now, far away, hardly a part of himself. Maybe Mayhem was absorbing the pain-sensation for him, he thought. Maybe Mayhem took the pain and suffered with it in the shared body so he, Larry, could still think. Maybe—

His blistered fingers were barely able to move within the insulated gloves, Larry fumbled with the hatch.

Ackerman Boone whirled suddenly. He had been intent upon the companionway door and the sounds behind him—which he had heard but not registered as dangerous for several seconds—now made him turn.

The man was peeling off a space suit. Literally peeling it off in strips from his lobster-red flesh. He blinked at Boone without seeing him. Dazzle-blinded, Boone thought, then realized his own vision was going.

"I'll kill you if you go near

that subspace drive!" Boone screamed.

"It's the only chance for all of us and you know it, Boone," the man said quietly. "Don't try to stop me."

Ackerman Boone lifted his N-gun and squinted through the haze of heat and blinding light. He couldn't see! He couldn't see . . .

Wildly, he fired the N-gun. Wildly, in all directions, spraying the room with it—

Larry dropped blindly forward. Twice he tripped over unconscious men, but climbed to his feet and went on. He could not see Boone, but he could see—vaguely—the muzzle flash of Boone's N-gun. He staggered across the room toward that muzzle-flash and finally embraced it—

And found himself fighting for his life. Boone was crazed now—with the heat and with his own failure. He bit and tore at Larry with strong claw-like fingers and lashed out with his feet. He balled his fists and hammered air like a windmill, arms flailing, striking flesh often enough to batter Larry toward the floor.

Grimly Larry clung to him, pulled himself upright, ducked his head against his chest and struck out with his own fists, feeling nothing, not knowing when they landed and when

they did not, hearing nothing but a far off roaring in his ears, a roaring which told him he was losing consciousness and had to act—soon—if he was going to save anyone . . .

He stood and pounded with his fists.

Pounded—air.

He did not know that Boone had collapsed until his feet trod on the man's inert body and then, quickly, he rushed toward the control board, rushed blindly in its direction, or in the direction he thought it would be, tripped over something, sprawled on the hot, blistering floor, got himself up somehow, crawled forward, pulled himself upright . . .

There was no sensation in his fingers. He did not know if he had actually reached the control board but abruptly he realized that he had not felt Mayhem's presence in his mind for several minutes. Was Mayhem conserving his energy for a final try, letting Larry absorb the punishment now so he—

Yes, Larry remembered thinking vaguely. It had to be that. For Mayhem knew how to work the controls, and he did not. Now his mind receded into a fog of semi-consciousness, but he was aware that his blistered fingers were fair-

ly flying across the control board, aware then of an inward sigh—whether of relief or triumph, he was never to know—then aware, abruptly and terribly, of a wrenching pain which seemed to strip his skin from his flesh, his flesh from his bones, the marrow from . . .

"Can you see?" the doctor asked.

"Yes," Larry said as the bandages were removed from his eyes. Three people were in the room with the doctor—Admiral Stapleton, the President—and Sheila. Somehow, Sheila was most important.

"We are now in subspace, thanks to you," the Admiral said. "We all have minor injuries as a result of the transfer, but there were only two fatalities, I'm happy to say. And naturally, the ship is now out of danger."

"What gets me, Grange," the President said, "is how you managed to work those controls. What the devil do you know about sub-space, my boy?"

"The two fatalities," the Admiral said, "were Ackerman Boone and the man he had killed." Then the Admiral grinned. "Can't you see, Mr. President, that he's not paying any attention to us? I think,

at the moment, the hero of the hour only has eyes for Miss Kelly here."

"Begging your pardons, sirs, yes," Larry said happily.

Nodding and smiling, the President of the Galactic Federation and Admiral Stapleton left the dispensary room—with the doctor.

"Well, hero," Sheila said, and smiled.

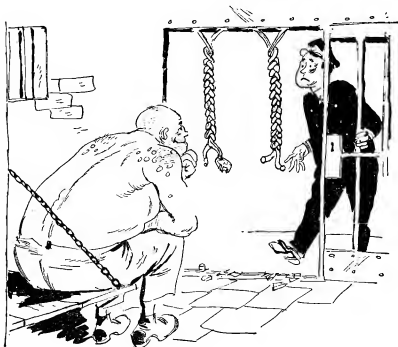
Larry realized—quite suddenly—that, inside himself,

he was alone. Mayhem had done his job—and vanished utterly.

"You know," Sheila said, "it's as if you—well, I hope this doesn't get you sore at me—as if you grew up overnight."

Before he kissed her Larry said: "Maybe you're right. Maybe I'll tell you about it someday. But you'd never believe me."

THE END





GNOMEBODY

By HARLAN ELLISON

About this "I'll grant you a wish" business — if it ever happens to you, insist on a contract. Get everything down in black and white and then read the fine print. Otherwise you might end up with a gift minus even a mouth to look in.

THEY call me - square. "Smitty, you are a real drag," they say. "You are so square—you got corners!" So all right, so I'm a goof-off as far as they know. Maybe I do get a little sore at things that

don't matter, but if Underfeld hadn't layed into me that day in the gym, nothing would have happened.

The trouble is, I get aggravated about little things, like not makin' the track team. So

I louse up on my schoolwork. This makes the teachers not dig me even a little. Also, I won't let them push me around. I'm firm; I don't take any guff. But that thing with track. It broke me up really good.

There I was standing in the gym, wearing these dirty white gym shorts with a black stripe down the side. And old Underfeld, that's the track coach, he comes up and says, "Whaddaya doin', Smitty?"

Well, anyone with 10-40 eyesight coulda seen what I was doing. I was doing push-ups. "I'm doing push-ups," I said, "Whaddaya think I'm doing? Raising artichokes?"

That was most certainly *not* the time to wise off to old Underfeld. I could see the steam pressure rising in the jerk's manner, and next thing he blows up all over the joint: "Listen, you little punk! Don't get so mouthy with me. In fact, I'm gonna tell you now, 'cause I don't want ya hangin' around the gym or track no more: You just ain't good enough. In a short sprint you got maybe a little guts, but when it comes to a long drag, fifty guys in this school who'd give their right arms to be on the team, beat you to the tape. Iyamsorry. Get out!"

He is sorry. Like hell!

He is no more sorry than I am as I say, "Ta hell with you, you chowderhead, you got no more brains than these ignorant sprinters what will fall dead before they get to the tape."

Underfeld looks at me like I had stuck him in the seat of his sweat pants with a fistful of pins and kind of gives a gasp, "What did you say?" he inquires, breathless like.

"I don't mumble, do I?" I snapped.

"Get out of here! Get outta here! *Geddouddaere!*"

He was making quite a fuss as I kicked my way out the door to the dressing rooms.

As I got dressed I gave the whole thing a good think. I was pretty sure that a couple of those stinkin' teachers I had guffed had put egghead Underfeld up to it. But what can a guy do? I'm just a kid, so says they. They got the cards stacked six ways from Culbertson, and that's it.

I was pretty damned sore as I kicked out the front door. I decided to head for the woods and try to get it off my mind. That I was cutting school did not bother me. My mother, maybe. But me? No. It was the woods for me for the rest of the afternoon.

Those woods. Something funny about them. D'ja ever notice, sometimes right in the middle of a big populated section they got a little stand of woods, real deep and shadowy, you can't see too far into them? You try to figure out why someone hasn't bought up the plot and put a house on it, or why they haven't made it into a playground? Well, that's what my woods were.

They faced back on a street full of those cracker-box houses constructed by the government, the factory workers shouldn't sleep on the curbs. On the other side, completely boxing them in, was a highway, running straight through to the big town. It isn't really big, but it makes the small town seem not so small.

I used to cut school and go there to read. In the center is a place where everything has that sort of filter light that seeps down between the tree branches, where there's a big old tree that is strictly one all alone.

What I mean is that tree is great. Big thing, stretches and's lost in the branches of the other trees, it's so big. And the roots look like they were forced up out of the ground under pressure, so

all's you can see are these sweeping arcs of thick roots, all shiny and risen right out, forming a little bowl under the tree.

Reason I like it so much there, is that it's quieter than anything, and you can feel it. The kind of quiet a library would like to have, but doesn't. To cap all this, the rift in the branches is just big enough so sunlight streams right through and makes a great reading light. And when the sun moves out of that rift, I know it's time to run for home. I make it in just enough time so that Mom doesn't know I'm cutting, and thinks I was in school all day.

So last week—I'd been going to the woods off, on, for about two months—I tagged over there, after that creep Underfeld told me I was his last possible choice for the track team. I had a copy of something or other, I don't remember now, I was going to read.

I settled down with my rump stuck into that bowl in the roots, and my feet propped against some smaller rootlings. With that little scrubby plant growth that springs up around the bases of trees, it was pretty comfortable, so I started reading.

Next, you are not going to believe.

I'm sitting there reading, and suddenly I feel this pressure against the seat of my jeans. Next thing I know, I am tumbled over on my head and a trapdoor is opening up out of the ground. Yeah, a trapdoor disguised as solid earth.

Next, you will *really* not believe.

Up out of this hole comes—may I be struck by green lightning if I'm a liar—a gnome! Or maybe he was a elf or a sprite, or some such thing. All I know is that this gnome character is wearing a pair of pegged charcoal slacks, a spread-collar turquoise shirt, green suede loafers, a pork-pie hat with a circumference of maybe three feet, a long, clinky keychain (what the Hell kinda keys could a gnome have?), repulsive loud tie and sun-glasses.

Now maybe you would be too stoned to move, or not believe your eyes, and let a thing like that rock you permanently. But I got a good habit of believing what I see—especially when it's in Technicolor—and besides, more out of reflex than anything else, I grabs.

I'd read some Grimm-type

fairy tales, and I knew the fable about how if you grab a gnome or a elf, he'll give you what you want, so like I said, I grabs.

I snatch this little character, right around his turquoise collar.

"Hold, man!" says the gnome, "what kinda bit is this? I don't dig this thing atall! Unhand me, Daddy-O!"

"No chance," I answer, kind of in a daze, still not quite sure this is happening to me, "I want a bag of gold or something."

The gnome looks outraged for a second, then he gives a kind of a half laugh and says, "Ho, Diz, you got the wrong cat for this caper. You're comin' on this bit too far and slow! Maybe a fourth-year gnome could dig this gold bit, but me, I'm a party-boy. Flunked outta my Alma Mammy first year. No matriculation—no magiculation! Readin' me, laddy-buck?"

"Uh, yeah, I guess," I ventured, slowly, "you mean you can't give me a bag of gold like in the fairy tale?"

"Fairy tale, schmerry tale. Maybe one ersatz Korean peso, Max, but that is definitely *it*. That is where magic and I parts company. In short, nein, man."

"Hmmm," I h m m m e d ,

tightening my grip a little, he shouldn't get ideas I was letting him get away.

I thought a big think for a minute then I said, "How come you flunked out of school?"

I thought I detected a note of belligerence in the gnome's voice when he answered, "How would you dig this class stuff, man? Go to class today, go to class tomorrow, yattata-yattata-yat from all these squared-up old codgers what think they are professors? Man, there is so much more else to be doing of note! Real nervous-type stuff like playin' with a jazz combo we got up near campus. You ain't never heard such music!" He appeared to just be starting, "We got a guy on the sackbut what is the coolest. And on dulcimer there is a little troll what can not only send you—but bring you back. And on topa' all this . . ."

I cut him short, "How about this usual three wishes business? Anything to that?"

"I can take a swing at it, man, but like I says, I'm nowhere when it comes to magicking. I'm not the most, if that's the least. Might be a bit sloppy, but I can take a whirl, Earl."

I thought again for a sec-

ond and then nodded: "Okay," setting him down on the turf, but not yet letting loose his collar, "but no funny business. Just a straight commercial proposition. Three wishes, with no strings, for your freedom."

"Three?" he was incredulous. "Man, *one* is about all this power pack can stand at this late date. No, it would seem that one is my limit, cat. Be taking it or leaving it."

"All right, then, *one*. But no legal loopholes. Let's do it all honest and above-board magic. Deal?"

"Deal," says he, and races off into the woods somewhere when I let loose.

I figured he was gone for good, and while I'm waiting, I start to think back on the events of the last few minutes. This is something woulda made Ripley go outta business. The gnome, I figure, is overdue, and so I begin rationalizing why he didn't come back and finally arrive at the conclusion that there is no honor among gnomes. Besides, he had a shifty look to him when he said there would be no tricks in the magic.

But he comes back in a minute, his keychain damn near tripping him up, he's so loaded down with stuff and

paraphernalia. Real weird lookin' items, too.

"Copped 'em from the lab over at the U.," he explains, waving a hand at the untidy pile of stuff. "Well, here goes. Remember, there may be more of a mess than is usual with an experienced practitioner, but I'm strictly a goony-bird in this biz, Jack."

"Hey, wait a minute with this magic stuff . . ." I began, but he waved me off impatiently, and began manipulating his implements.

So he starts drawing a star-like thing on the ground, pouring some stinkin' stuff into a cauldron, mixing it up, muttering some gibberish that I could swear had "Oo-bop-shebam" and "Oo-shooby-dooby" in there somewhere, and a lot of other.

Pretty soon he comes over, sprinkles some powder on me, and I sneeze, almost blowing him over.

"Gesundheit," he mutters, staring at me nastily.

He sprinkles some more powder on me, mutters something that sounded like, "By the sacred ring-finger of The Great God Broo-Beck, man, dig this kid what he craveth. Go, go, go, man!"

"Now," he inquires, around a bag in which he is rattling

what sounds like bones, "whaddaya want?"

I had been thinking it out, in between incantations, and I had decided what I wanted. "Make me so's I can run faster than anyone in the school, willya?"

The little gnome nods as if he understands, and starts running around and around outside this star-like thing, in ever-decreasing circles, faster n' faster, till I can hardly make him out.

Then he slows and stops, puffing away like crazy. He mumbles something about, "Gotta lay off them clover stems," and so saying throws this pink powder on me, squeezin' it out of one of these poof, poof! plastic bottles. Then he yells as loud as he can, "Frrracted!"

Up goes a puff of pink smoke and what looks like a sideshow magician's magnesium flare, and the next thing I know, I am all alone.

The gnome is gone, and I got my wish.

That's the bit. I got my wish.

What's that? Did he make me so's I can run faster than anyone else in the school? Oh, yeah. *Sure* he did!

You know anybody can use a four-legged school boy?

THE END

AMAZING STORIES

SUMMER SNOW STORM

By ADAM CHASE

Snow in summer is of course impossible. Any weather expert will tell you so. Weather Bureau Chief Botts was certain no such absurdity could occur. And he would have been right except for one thing. It snowed that summer.

IT WAS, as the expression goes, raining cats and dogs. Since the Weather Bureau had predicted fair and warmer, the Weather Bureau was not particularly happy about the meteorological state of affairs. No one, however was shocked.

Until it started to snow.

This was on the twenty-fifth of July in the U.S.A. . . .

Half an hour before the fantastic meteorological turn of events, Bureau Chief Botts dangled the forecast sheet before Johnny Sloman's blood-shot eyes and barked, "It's all over the country by now, you dunderhead!" Then, as an afterthought: "Did you write this?"

"Yes," said Sloman miserably.

Slowly, Botts said, "Tem-

perature, eighty degrees. Precipitation expected: snow. Snow, Sloman. Well, that's what it says."

"It was a mistake, Chief. Just—heh-heh—a mistake."

"The prediction should have been for fair and warmer!" Botts screamed.

"But it's raining," Sloman pointed out.

"We make mistakes," said Botts in a suddenly velvety voice. Then, as if *that* had been a mistake, bellowed: "But not this kind of mistake, Sloman! Snow in July! We have a reputation to maintain! If not for accuracy, at least for credulity."

"Yes, sir," said Johnny Sloman. One of the troubles was, he had a hangover. Although, actually, that was a consequence of the real trouble.

The real trouble was his fiancée. Make that his ex-fiancée. Because last night Jo-Anne had left him. "You—you're just going no place at all, Johnny Sloman," she had said. "You're on a treadmill and—not even running very fast." She had given him back the quarter-carat ring tearfully, but Johnny hadn't argued. Jo-Anne had a stubborn streak and he knew when Jo-Anne's mind was made up. So Johnny had gone and gotten drunk for the first time since the night after college graduation, not too many years ago, and the result was a nationally-distributed forecast of snow.

Chief Botts' first flush of anger had now been replaced by self-pity. His red, loose-jowled face was sagging and his eyes became watery as he said, "At least you could have double-checked it. As a member of this Bureau you only have to fill out the forecast once every ten days. Is that so hard? Is there any reason why you should predict snow for July 25th?" His voice became silky soft as he added, "You realize, of course, Sloman, that if this was anything but a civil service job you'd be out on your ear for a stunt like this! Well, there are other ways. I can pass

over you for promotion. I *intend* to pass over you until the crack of doom. You'll be a GS-5 the rest of your working life. Are you satisfied, Sloman? Snow in July . . ." Chief Botts' voice trailed off, the Chief following it.

Johnny sat with his head in his hands until Harry Bettis, the GS-5 weatherman who shared his small office with him, came in. Naturally, hangover or no, Johnny had reported for work first. Johnny was always first in the office, but it didn't seem to do any good. Now, Harry Bettis could come in an hour late and read the funnies half the day and flirt with the secretarial staff the other half and still be Chief Botts' odds-on favorite for the promotion that was opening next month. Harry Bettis was like that.

He came in and gave Johnny the full treatment. First the slow spreading smile. Then the chuckle. Then the loud, roaring belly-laugh. "Gals outside told me!" he shouted, loud enough so the girls outside would know he knew they had told him. "Snow! Snow in July! Sloman, you kill me! You really do!"

"Do you have to shout?" Johnny said.

"Do I? We all ought to



Thick mud held him while terror ravened at his heels.

shout this. To the rooftops! Sloman, my foot. You have a new name, sonny. Snowman! Johnny Snowman."

Johnny groaned. Instinctively, he knew the name would stick.

"Hear you had a little trouble with the gal-friend this past p.m.," Harry Bettis clucked in a voice which managed to be both derisive and sympathetic.

"How did you find out?" Johnny asked, but knew the answer at once. Jo-Anne was a roommate of one of the Bureau Secretaries. It was how Johnny had met her.

"You know how I found out, Snowman. Well, that's tough luck, kiddo. But tell me, does that mean the field is wide open? I always thought your gal-friend—your *ex*-gal-friend—had the cutest pair of—"

"I have nothing to do with whether the field is open or not open, I'm afraid."

"Well, don't be. Afraid, I mean," Harry Bettis advised jovially. "If the gal could make you pull a boner like that, you're better off without her. But I forgot to ask Maxine: can I have little Jo-Anne's phone number? Huh, boy?"

Before Johnny could answer, the three-girl staff of

secretaries entered the small office. Entered—and stared.

"That's all right, girls," Harry Bettis said. "You didn't have to follow me in here. I'd have been right out."

But they weren't staring at Harry Bettis. They were staring at Johnny. Their mouths had flapped open, their eyes were big and round. Johnny didn't, but Harry Bettis knew that look on a girl's face. Without any trouble at all, Johnny could have made any of those girls, right there, right then, without even trying.

They gawked and gawked. One of them pointed at the window. The others tried to, but their hands were trembling.

The one who was pointing squawked: "Look!"

The second one said, "Out the window!"

The third one said, "Will you!"

Outside the window on the twenty-fifth of July it was snowing.

It was an hour later. Telephones were ringing. Long-distance calls from all over the country now that the ticker had gone out with the incredible fact that it was snowing in the Northeast in July. Most of the calls,

though, were from Washington. Chief Botts disconnected the PBX and walked in a dazed, staggering fashion to Johnny, smiling weakly and saying:

"Sloman, I misjudged you. Genius, right here, right now, in this office, and we never knew it. Sloman, I have to admit I was wrong about you. But how did you know? How did you ever know?"

"Hell's bells," Harry Bettis said before Johnny could say it was all a mistake. "That's easy, Chief. Anyone knows that *all* rain starts out as snow. It's got to. You see, the droplets of moisture in the cold upper regions of a cloud condense around dust particles because the air up there is too cold to hold them as vapor. Since it's below freezing, snow is formed—snow which warms up as it passes through hotter air en route to the ground, and—"

"That will be quite enough, Bettis," Chief Botts said. "I am a weatherman too, you know. You don't have to tell me the most elementary of—"

"In this case, Chief," Bettis persisted, "the biggest inversion layer you ever saw kept the surface air down and brought the cold upper air very close to the surface. Result: the snowflakes didn't

have a chance to melt, not even to freezing rain. Result: snow!"

"The chances of that happening," said Chief Botts coldly, "are about one in a billion. Aren't they, Sloman, dear fellow?"

"One in two billion," Johnny said.

"He is modest," Chief Botts told the staff. "He seems so unconcerned."

Just then Maxine came into the little office. The look of awe on her face had been replaced by one of sheer amazement. "Well, I checked it, Chief," she said. "Wait until I tell Jo-Anne!"

"Won't you please tell us first?" Chief Botts asked.

"Yes, sir," said Maxine, and read from the memo pad in her hand. "Since coming to work for the Bureau, Johnny Sloman has once every ten days made our official forecast. I have checked back on his forecast, Chief, as you directed. Johnny has made fifty-five forecasts. While only one of them—startlingly—has called for snow in July—every single one of them has been right."

There was a shocked silence. "But—but the Weather Bureau average is only eighty-eight percent!" Harry Bettis gasped.

"You mean," Chief Botts corrected him, "eighty-eight percent is the figure we try to foist on the unsuspecting public. Actually, the Weather Bureau averages a bare seventy-five percent, and you know it."

"But Sloman's got a hundred percent accuracy—up to and including snow in July," Harry Bettis said in a shocked voice.

"It was only an accident," Johnny said in a mild voice. "I didn't mean to write snow."

"Accident, smaccident," said Harry Bettis. "It was no accident with a record like that. You have the uncanny ability to forecast weather with complete accuracy, Johnny, boy. You realize what that means, old pal?"

"I'd better call Washington and tell them," Chief Botts said, but Harry Bettis held his arm while Johnny mused:

"I guess I realize what it means, Harry. That is, if you're right. No more getting wet on picnics. Because I'd know. I'd know, Harry. No more going to ball games and having them rained out on you. No more being caught by a thunderstorm at the beach . . ."

"Johnny!" Harry Bettis said. "Think, pal. Think!"

"I'm calling Washington," Chief Botts said. "This is too much for me."

But Harry Bettis was still holding his arm. "Now, just a minute, bucko," he said. "You're not calling anyone—not without his manager's permission."

"Whose manager's permission?"

"Why, Mr. Sloman's manager's permission, of course. In a word, me."

"This is preposterous!" Chief Botts cried.

"Is it?" Bettis asked. "Listen, Johnny, don't let anyone sell you a bill of goods—like, the Civil Service Commission giving you a GS-8 rating and sending you to Washington. Because stick with me, kid, and there'll be great things in store for you, you'll see."

"Such," said Maxine dubiously, "as what?"

"Are you on our side?" Harry Bettis asked her suspiciously.

"I'm on Jo-Anne's side. If old Johnny here has something she ought to have, I want to know it."

"You mean, if she ought to change her mind and marry him? I'll admit it even if I think Jo-Anne's a real cute trick: she'd be nuts if she didn't." Women, Harry Bettis

did not add, never came between Harry Bettis and ten percent of a gold mine. But that's what he was thinking. He went on: "Just think of it, Johnny. Drought in the Midwest. They call Sloman. Sloman predicts rain. It rains. Have any idea what they'd pay for a stunt like that? Or swollen rivers in New England, or California. Looks like another big flood is on the way, but they call Sloman. Looks like rain, kiddo? That don't matter. Predict a dry spell and it won't rain. Do you know," Harry Bettis said in a devout whisper, "what a stunt like that would be worth? Millions."

"Yeah, wise guy," said Maxine. "So what's in it for you?"

Harry Bettis did not look at Maxine when he answered. He looked at Johnny and said, "I'll be frank, kiddo. You have the talent, but you don't have the salesmanship to promote it. Do you want a mediocre job while the weather boys exploit you for the rest of your life or—do you want greatness, riches, and Jo-Anne?"

"Jo-Anne," Johnny said.

Harry Bettis nodded. "My price is twenty-five percent."

"Of Jo-Anne?" Maxine asked suspiciously.

"Of everything Johnny makes as the world's first *real* Weather Man. Not a forecaster—a commander. Because when my client forecasts the weather, it happens. Brothers and sisters, it happens." He turned abruptly to Johnny, said, "You have any money saved up?"

"A few hundred dollars, but—"

"An ad in the papers. Alongside the article telling how it snowed on July twenty-fifth. Saying that your services are for hire. We're a sho-in, kid!"

"Well, if you say so," Johnny said doubtfully.

"So don't call D.C.," Bettis told Chief Botts.

"But Sloman's an employee of this Bureau."

"Was, you mean."

"What did you say?"

"Was an employee. He ain't an employee now. He's quitting—with his manager," said Harry Bettis, and walked out of the office, steering a dazed Johnny Sloman with him.

"Wait until I call Jo-Anne," Maxine said.

During the next six months, Johnny Sloman—known to the world as The Weather Man—made fifty million dollars. Since it had taken whole lifetime for him to de-

velop his remarkable talent, his lawyers were trying to have capital gains declared on the earnings rather than straight income tax. The odds seemed to be in their favor.

How had Johnny made his fifty million dollars? By predicting the weather. He predicted:

A flood in the Texas panhandle—in time to save the dry lands from going entirely arid.

An end of the snowstorms in northern Canada—which had trapped the five hundred residents of a small uranium-mining town without food or adequate drinking water.

The break-up of Hurricane Anita—which had threatened to be the most destructive ever to strike the Carolina Coast.

No frost for Florida that winter—a prediction still to be ascertained, but a foregone conclusion.

Every prediction had come true. In time, the world began to realize that his predictions were not predictions at all: they were sure things. That is, they predicted nothing—they *made* things happen. Johnny was in demand everywhere and naturally could not fill all engagements. Harry Bettis hired a whole squad of corresponding secretaries,

whose job it was to turn down, with regret, some ninety percent of the jobs requested. Johnny, in fact, was in such demand, that his engagement to Jo-Anne—which, of course, had been reinstated at her insistence—remained only an engagement. The nuptials were put off, and put off again.

This suited Harry Bettis, who saw to it that Johnny kept putting off the marriage. Because, ultimately, Jo-Anne would reach the end of her proverbial tether and decide that Harry's twenty-five percent, if it could be shared as a wife, was better than Johnny's seventy-five percent, if it could not.

Jo-Anne, though, was not that kind of girl. Harry Bettis, knowing no other kind of girl, never understood that.

The scientists, meanwhile, had a field day with Johnny. His strange talent obeyed no natural law, they said, and at first attributed it to random chance. Soon, though, this became patently impossible. And so a new natural law was sought. All types of hair-brained theories were proposed, none of them accepted, until an osteopathic physician in Duluth, Minn., hit upon the theory that staggered the world with its simplicity and,

eventually, was accepted as that which explained the strange phenomenon of Johnny Sloman.

The osteopath, many of whose patients suffered from rheumatism which was aggravated by the bitter Minnesota winters, suggested that Johnny Sloman was a case of rheumatism in reverse. The weather, he pointed out, had an adverse effect upon the symptoms of his patients. Conversely, why couldn't some human being—a Johnny Sloman, for example—affect the weather in precisely the same way that the weather invariably affected his rheumatic patients?

It was clear, simple, lucid. It was the only theory which could not be disproven by the weight of scientific knowledge. It thus became the accepted theory.

"The Under-Secretary of Defense to see you," Maxine said one day during the winter following Johnny's July snowfall.

"Don't see him," Harry Bettis said. "You don't want to see him."

"But why not?" Johnny asked.

"Because they'll make you a dollar-a-year man and we're not in this to make any stink-

ing dollar a year," Harry Bettis said.

"Well, I think I ought to see him, anyway. At least see him." He turned to Jo-Anne, who was sitting at the next desk, writing up some reports. "What do you think, Jo?"

"If the country needs you, Johnny," she said, "it's your duty to help."

Johnny told Maxine, "Show the Under-Secretary in, please."

He was a small man with a big brief case. He spoke slowly, earnestly, backing up his statements with reams of paper from the brief case. The Defense Department had not contacted Johnny right away, he said, because they wanted to compile all the facts. They had all the facts now.

Johnny Sloman could be the biggest single factor for peace the world had ever known.

Item. In the event of aggression, he could so bog down the aggressor's supply lines and troop movements with continuous rains and snowstorms that it would be all but impossible for the aggressor to maintain hostilities.

Item. In the event that such tactical weather-war failed, he could cause a drought in the aggressor's food-producing regions, forcing the ag-

gressor to surrender or face starvation.

Item. He could always, conversely, see to it that the defensive force's supply lines were never hampered by the weather and that the precipitation over the defensive country's breadbasket was ideal.

Item. He could render aggressor communication difficult with heavy fog and/or icy roads.

Item. He could cover defensive troop movements with low, dense clouds.

In short, concluded the Under-Secretary, Johnny Sloman could be a one-man world police-force practically guaranteeing peace. He stopped talking. He looked at Johnny. His eyes said, the call of duty is clear.

Harry Bettis said, "Well, thank you for your time, Mr. Secretary. Naturally, we'll think about what you said."

"Think about it!" gasped the Under-Secretary. "Think about it!"

"My client is a busy man—the busiest man in his field," Harry Bettis said.

The Under-Secretary smiled bleakly. "The only man in his field, you mean. That's why we need him."

"We'll send you a report in a few weeks," Harry said indifferently, "after we've had

an opportunity to study the situation."

"But, Harry—" Johnny began.

"Johnny," Harry said. He did not have to finish the statement. It had happened before—Johnny, I've made you a tremendous success. I'm your manager, aren't I? Let's leave it that way."

"If Johnny thinks he ought to help—" Jo-Anne said.

"Now, Jo-Anne," Harry Bettis scolded, and led the Under-Secretary to the door.

Three days later, the assistant chief of the F.B.I. came to see them. "We regret this, Sloman," he said.

"You regret what?" Harry Bettis asked.

"Defense allowed a report on its findings out. That was unwise. We'll have to give you around-the-clock protection, Sloman."

"Protection from what?" Johnny wanted to know.

"Enemy agents. The enemy is desperate. At all costs, according to their intelligence reports, they're out to get you."

"Get him?" said Harry Bettis. "You mean, kill him?"

"I mean, get him. Get him on their side. Because everything Johnny could do for the forces of peace and democ-

racy, he could be made to do for the forces of aggression. You see?"

"Yes," said Johnny.

"No," said Harry Bettis. "This sounds like a government trick—to make Johnny go to work. To make him think it's his patriotic duty—"

"Well," said Jo-Anne sharply, "isn't it?"

Harry Bettis smiled. "When he gets as big as Universal Motors, he can become patriotic."

"Mr. Sloman," the assistant F.B.I. chief said, "they will either try to kidnap you outright, or work on you through someone you love. Therefore, our bodyguards—"

"Well, let them keep their distance, that's all," Bettis said. "Bad for business. Nobody wants enemy agents hanging around."

"That's your final decision?" the F.B.I. man asked.

"Well—" Began Johnny.

"Yes, it's our final decision," said Harry Bettis, showing the F.B.I. man to the door.

"I don't think you should have done that," Johnny said after he had gone.

"You just make the weather, Johnny-boy. I'll take care of business."

"Well—" said Johnny.

"Johnny!" cried Jo-Anne. "Oh, Johnny! Why don't you act like a man?" And she ran from the room, slamming the door.

After that, Johnny didn't see her again.

She was gone.

Really gone, for certain, not simply walking off in a huff.

Two weeks later, Johnny got the letter—unofficial—from the Enemy.

The F.B.I. was sympathetic, but the Chief said, "You can understand, Mr. Sloman, how our hands are tied. It is not an official letter. We can't prove anything. We don't doubt it for a minute, of course. The cold war enemy has kidnapped your fiancée and taken her to their motherland. But—we can't prove it. Not being able to prove it, we can't do a thing about it. You're aware, of course, of how readily the rest of the world condemns our actions. Not that they wouldn't be on our side if we could prove that this kidnap letter was the real thing, but you realize we won't be able to prove it at all."

"Oh," said Johnny. He went home. He saw Harry Bettis, who said he was shocked. The note read:

Mr. Johnny Sloman:

We have Miss Jo-Anne Davis here in the motherland. The only way she can live a normal life here is if you join her and work for us. We believe you know what the other kind of life is like here.

Bettis said, "It stumps the hell out of me, Johnny."

"I'm just waking up," said Johnny slowly. "In a way, it's your fault."

"Now, don't be a jackass, Johnny."

Jackass or no, Johnny hit him. His knuckles went crunch and Harry Bettis' nose went crunch and Bettis fell down. He lay there, his nose not looking so good.

Now, when it was apparently too late, Johnny knew what his course of action should have been. Get rid of the money-grubbing Bettis. Go to work for the government unselfishly. Insure world peace.

Too late . . . too late . . .

Because unless he could somehow save Jo-Anne, he would never predict the weather again—for anyone.

"But what you ask is impossible!" the Secretary of Defense said a few days later.

"If I come back, if I'm suc-

cessful," Johnny said quietly, "I'm your man, for as long as you want me, without pay."

"You mean that?" the Secretary asked slowly.

"I mean it."

The Secretary nodded grimly, touched a button on his desk. "Get me Air Force Chief of Staff Burns," he said, and, a moment later: "Bernie? Chuck here. We need a plane. A jet-transport to go you-know-where. Cargo? One man, in a parachute. Can you manage it? Immediately, if not sooner. Good boy, Bernie. No . . . no, I'm sorry, I can't tell you a thing about it." The Secretary cut the connection, turned to Johnny:

"You leave this afternoon, Sloman. You realize, of course, there isn't a thing we can do to get you out. Not a thing."

"Yes," said Johnny.

"You're a very brave man, or very much in love."

Hours later, the jet transport took off with Johnny in it.

He came down near what had been the border of the motherland and Poland. He began to walk. A farmer and his son spotted the parachute, came after him. The son was a Red Army man on leave. The son had a gun. He fired prematurely, and Johnny ran.

It was hopeless, he decided. He would never make it. He would never even reach the capital alive, where they were holding Jo-Anne.

He ran.

He wished for rain. A blinding rainstorm. The clouds scudded in. The rain fell in buckets. The farmer and his son soon lost sight of Johnny.

Just to make sure, Johnny ran and let it go on raining.

"Floods in their motherland," the Secretary of Defense told the President. "Naturally, their news broadcasts are trying to keep the reports to a minimum, but these are the biggest floods we've ever heard of over there."

"Our man is there?" the President asked.

"He was dropped by parachute, sir!"

It was snowing when Johnny reached the capital. He had been parachuted into the enemy's motherland, naturally, because propinquity alone assured the success of his strange talent.

He was tired. His feet ached. He'd been the only one heading for the capital. Hundreds of thousands had been fleeing from the floods . . .

"There he is!" a voice cried in the enemy language. He didn't understand the language, but he understood the tone. His picture had been flashed across the length and breadth of the motherland. He had been spotted.

He ran. Down an alley, across a muddy yard, floundering to his knees, then his thighs, in thick mud. They came floundering in pursuit. They fired a warning volley of shots. He stumbled and fell face down in the black, stinking mud.

They took him . . .

Dark room. One light, on his face. A voice: "We can kill you."

"Kill me," he said. "My last wish will be for rain. Rain, forever."

"We can torture you."

"And I will say, before you start, let it rain and go on raining. Let me be powerless to prevent it. Rain!"

"We can kill the girl."

"Your country will float away."

A fist came at him out of the darkness. Hit him. It was tentative torture. He sobbed and thought: rain, harder. Rain, rain, rain . . .

Water seeped into the dungeon. This had never happened before. The fist went away.

Outside it rained and rained.

"What does he want, comrade?"

"We don't know, comrade?"

"Give it to him—whatever it is. He has disrupted our entire economy. We face economic disaster unless he—and his rain—leave us in peace."

"Perhaps that is what he wants. Peace."

"You fool! We are supposed to want peace. Shut up!"

"Yes, sir. Comrade."

"Better ask the party secretary."

"Yes, comrade."

The party secretary was asked. The party secretary sighed and nodded.

Johnny saw the light of day. And Jo-Anne.

A month later, the Secretary of Defense told him. "Thanks to you, they agreed to a German settlement, stopped sending arms to their Red ally in Asia, withdrew their promise of aid to the Arab fanatics, and have freed

all foreigners held in their motherland illegally."

Johnny listened, smiling at Jo-Anne. They had been married two weeks. Naturally, the enemy had been only too glad to see them leave.

"Just stay available, Slo-man," the President beamed from alongside the Secretary of Defense. "As long as they know we can always send you over there again, they'll never try anything. Right?"

"Yes, sir," said Johnny.

They called him the Weather Man. They went on calling him the Weather Man, although he retired more or less—except during cases of dire emergency.

The world called him that, the Weather Man. And, because he had retired to enjoy life with his new wife, they began to suspect, as could be expected, that he had been a fraud.

But the enemy did not think so. Ever again.

And that was enough for Johnny.

THE END

Watch for

PEN PALS

No other magazine like it!

on sale in October



BY THE READERS

Dear Editor:

I like your stories and all of the departments except "The Spectroscope." If you had a personals column instead, your magazine would be just about perfect.

Wilford Lee
716 Lindon St.
Boise, Idaho

• *We gave a lot of thought to a personals column and discarded the idea for the time being. Maybe later.—ED.*

Dear Editor:

The August *Amazing* continues in the tradition of enjoyable reading. Most entertaining in my opinion: "Beast With 7 Tails," "Corn-Fed Genius," "Death of a Dinosaur." Llewellyn's illos set off the issue very well. Hope to be seeing some serials soon.

Herbert E. Beach
210 West Paquin
Waterville, Minn.

• *We will announce a two-part serial in the near future—a story on the Burroughs tradition.—ED.*

Dear Editor:

Recently Lethalu Ray was wondering if *Amazing* had any female readers. Well, I have been reading it and other s-f for

fourteen years. I enjoy all the stories and like to speculate about how many things written as fantasy or fiction may turn out to be true in the future.

Mrs. Audrey F. Brooks
Box 244
Salmon Arm, B. C.

• *Calling all female readers! Send your names in for listing in The Space Club. Make your presence known!—ED.*

Dear Editor:

The July issue was the best in a series of excellent magazines. Especially want to congratulate Mr. Valigursky on his cover.

The "Mayhem" stories are tops and I certainly want more. "Or So You Say" is the finest I've run across.

Jim Galloway
306 N. Edgeworth Ave.
Royal Oak, Mich.

• *The Mayhem series is immensely popular. We have several more of these exciting yarns in the files. This, of course, makes Mr. Thames very, very happy.—ED.*

Dear Editor:

I have been reading *Amazing* for quite some time and enjoy every story. One thing bothered me on the July cover. The fellow has a space helmet which seems to represent no oxygen content on that planet. The girl has no helmet. I would appreciate an explanation.

Herbert Clark
19 Robbins St.
Waltham 54, Mass.

• *It's long been said that the female is deadlier than male. Perhaps they're also a lot harder.—ED.*

Dear Editor:

As a whole enjoyed the July issue of *Amazing*. My one complaint is that you sometimes give away too much of the story

in the introduction. This occasionally occurs in the illustrations too. Hope they'll be a little more subtle from now on.

Ron Haydock complained about the change from pulp to digest size. Seems that the only thing he could really regret is the decrease in pages that resulted. Who would prefer the cumbersome, poorly printed, messy magazines to the smaller, more compact, neater digest size? However, I do agree wholeheartedly with him that *Fantastic* go back to horror and fantasy.

One other suggestion: seems to me you could improve *Amazing* by adding more features—perhaps a personals column or biographies of the writers and artists.

Esmond Adams
432 Locust St.
Huntsville, Ala.

• *You have a good point in this tip-off business, Mr. Adams. We'll watch that closely in the future.*—ED.

Dear Mr. Fairman:

The August issue was great. Art Hayes has a good idea, a way to get lots of letters in and suit both sides.

Edward Gorman
119 1st Ave., S.W.
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

• *Mr. Hayes' letter, along with many others, were in a large part responsible for the creation of our new feature—The Space Club—which will make its debut in the November issue of Amazing Stories. Watch for it.*—ED.

Watch for

DREAM WORLD

On Sale December 11

WORTH WAITING FOR

My Shipmate—Columbus

By STEPHEN WILDER

We've been taught from childhood that the earth is round and that Columbus discovered America. But maybe we take too much on faith. This first crossing for instance. Were you there? Did you see Columbus land? Here's the story of a man who can give us the straight facts.

THE laughter brought spots of color to his cheeks. He stood there for a while, taking it, and then decided he had had enough and would sit down. A whisper of amusement still stirred the room as he returned to his seat and the professor said,

"But just a moment, Mr. Jones. Won't you tell the class what makes you think Columbus was not the 'bold skipper' the history books say he was. After all, Mr. Jones, this is a history class. If you know more or better history than the history books do, isn't it your duty to tell us?"



He clutched at his



slashed veins and snarled into the face of death.

"I didn't say he *wasn't*," Danny Jones said desperately as the laughter started again. Some profs were like that, he thought. Picking on one student and making the rest of the class laugh and think what a great guy the prof was and what a prize dodo the hapless student was. "I said," Danny went on doggedly, "Columbus might not have been — maybe wasn't — the bold skipper the history books claim he was. I can't prove it. No one can. I haven't a time machine."

Again it was the wrong thing to say. The professor wagged a finger in front of his face and gave Danny a sly look. "Don't you," he said, "don't you indeed? I was beginning to think you had been willed H. G. Wells' famous literary invention, *y o u n g* man." That one had the class all but rolling in the aisles.

Danny said desperately, "No! No, I mean, they don't even know for sure if Columbus was born in Genoa. They just think he was. So they also could be wrong about—"

Abruptly the professor's face went serious. "My dear Mr. Jones," he said slowly, acidly, "don't you think we've had enough of fantasy? Don't you think we ought to return to history?"

Danny sat down and for a moment shut his eyes but remained conscious of everyone looking at him, staring at him, evaluating. It wasn't so easy, he decided, being a sophomore transfer student from a big city college, where almost everything went and there was a certain amount of anonymity in the very size of the classes, to a small town college where every face, after a week or so, was familiar. Danny wished he had kept his big yap shut about Columbus, but it was too late now. They'd be ribbing him for weeks. . . .

On his way back to the dorm after classes he was hailed by a student who lived down the hall from him, a fellow named Groves, who said, "How's the boy, Danny. Next thing you'll tell us is that Cortez was really a sexy Spanish broad with a thirty-eight bust who conquered Montezuma and his Indians with sex appeal. Get it, boy. I said—"

"Aw, lay off," Danny grumbled.

The other boy laughed, then shrugged, then said, "Oh yeah, forgot to tell you. There's a telegram waiting for you in the dorm. House mother's got it. Well, see you, Vasco da Gama."

Danny trudged on to the Georgian-style dormitory and went inside, through the lobby and behind the stairs to the house-mother's office at the rear of the building. She was a kindly-looking old woman with a halo of white hair and a smile which made her a good copy of everyone's grandmother. But now her face was set in unexpectedly grim lines. "Telegram for you, Danny," she said slowly. "They read it over the telephone first, then delivered it." She held out a yellow envelope. "I'm afraid it's some bad news, D a n n y." She seemed somehow reluctant to part with the little yellow envelope.

"What is it?" Danny said.

"You'd better read it yourself. Here, sit down."

Danny nodded, took the envelope, sat down and opened it. He read, MR. DANNY JONES, WHITNEY COLLEGE, WHITNEY, VIRGINIA R E G R E T T O INFORM YOU U N C L E AVERILL PASSED AWAY LAST NIGHT PEACEFULLY IN HIS SLEEP LEAVING UNSPECIFIED PROPERTY TO YOU. It was signed with a name Danny did not recognize.

"I'm terribly sorry," the house-mother said, placing

her hand on Danny's shoulder.

"Oh, that's all right, Mrs. Grange. It's all right. You see, Uncle Averill wasn't a young man. He must have been in his eighties."

"Were you very close to him, Danny?"

"No, not for a long time. When I was a kid—"

Mrs. Grange smiled.

"Well, when I was eight or nine, I used to see him all the time. We stayed at his place on the coast near St. Augustine, Florida, for a year. I—I feel sorry about U n c l e Averill, Mrs. Grange, but I feel better about something that happened in class today. I—I think Uncle Averill would have approved of how I acted."

"Want to talk about it?"

"Well, it's just he always said never to take any so-called fact for granted, especially in history. I can almost remember his voice now, the way he used to say, 'if ever there's an argument in history, sonny, all you ever get is the propaganda report of the side which won.' You know, Mrs. Grange, I think he was right. Of course, a lot of folks thought old Uncle Averill was a little queer. Touched in the head is what they said."

"They oughtn't to say such things."

"Always tinkering around in his basement. Funny, nobody ever knew on what. He wouldn't let anybody near the place. He had a time lock and everything. What nobody could figure out is if he was trying so hard to guard something that was in the basement, why did he sometimes disappear for weeks on end without even telling anybody where he went. And I remember," Danny went on musing, "every time he came back he went into that harangue about history, as if somehow he had confirmed his suspicions. He was a funny old guy but I liked him."

"You remembering him so vividly after all these years will be the best epitaph your uncle could have, Danny. But what are you going to do? About what he left you, I mean."

"Uncle Averill always liked promptness. If he left something for me, he'd want me to pick it up immediately. I guess I ought to go down there to St. Augustine as fast as I can."

"But your classes—"

"I'll have to take an emergency leave of absence."

"Under the circumstances, I'm sure the college will ap-

prove. Do you think your uncle left you anything—well—important?"

"Important?" Danny repeated the word. "No, I don't think so. Not by the world's standards. But it must have been important to Uncle Averill. He was a—you know, an image-breaker—"

"An iconoclast," supplied Mrs. Grange.

"Yes'm, an iconoclast. But I liked him."

Mrs. Grange nodded. "You'd better get over and see the Dean."

An hour later, Danny was at the bus depot, waiting for the Greyhound that would take him over to Richmond, where he would meet a train for the south and Florida.

It was a rambling white stucco house with a red tile roof and a pleasant grove of palm trees in front and flamed hibiscus climbing the stucco. The lawyer, whose name was Tartalion, met him at the door.

"I'll get right down to business, Mr. Jones," Tartalion said after they had entered the house. "Your uncle wanted it that way."

"Wait a minute," Danny said, "don't tell me they already had the funeral?"

"Your uncle didn't believe

in funerals. His will stipulated cremation."

"But, it was so—"

"Sudden? I know, the will wasn't officially probated. But your uncle had a judge for a friend, and under the circumstances, his wishes were granted. Now, then, you know why you're here?"

"You mean, what he left me? I thought I'd at least get to see his—"

"His body? Not your uncle, not old Averill Jones. You ought to know better. Sonny," the lawyer asked abruptly, "how well did you know the old man?"

The sonny rankled. After all, Danny thought, I'm nineteen. I like beer and girls and I'm no sonny anymore. He sighed and thought of his history class, then thought of Uncle Averill's opinion of history, and felt better. He explained the relationship to Mr. Tartalion and waited for the lawyer to speak.

"Well, it beats me," Tartalion admitted. "Why he left it to a nephew he hasn't seen in ten or eleven years, I mean. Don't just look at me like that. You know that contraption he had in the basement, don't you? How he wouldn't let a soul near it, ever? Then tell me something, Danny. Why did he leave it to you?"

"You're joking!" Danny cried.

"I was your uncle's lawyer. I wouldn't joke about it. He said it was the only thing he had worth willing. He said he willed it to you. Want me to read you the clause?"

Danny nodded. He felt strangely flattered, because the contraption in Averill Jones' basement—a contraption which no one but Averill Jones had ever seen—had been the dearest thing in the old bachelor's life. Actually, he was not Danny's uncle, but his grand-uncle. He had lived alone in St. Augustine and had liked living alone. The only relative he had tolerated was Danny, when Danny was a small boy. Then, as Danny approached his ninth birthday, the old man had said, "They're teaching you too much at school, son. Too many wrong things, too many highfalutin' notions, too much just plain old hogwash. Why don't you kind of make yourself scarce for a few years?" It had been blunt and to the point. It had made Danny cry. He hadn't thought of what had happened that last day he'd seen his grand-uncle for years, but he thought of it now.

"But why can't I come back

and see you?" he had asked tearfully.

"On account of the machine son"

"But *why*, uncle?"

"Hey, come on now and stop your blubbering all over me. If you can't you can't."

"You have to tell me why!"

"Stubborn little critter. Well, I like that. All right, I'll tell you why. Because the machine has a funny kind of fuel, that's why. It doesn't run on gasoline, Danny, or anything like that."

"What does it do, uncle?"

But the old man had shaken his head. "Maybe someday after I'm gone you'll find out. If anyone finds out, it will be you, and that's a promise."

"You still didn't tell me why I have to go away."

"Because—well, don't go telling this to your folks, son, or they'll think old uncle Averill has a screw loose somewheres — because that machine I have downstairs runs on faith. On faith, you understand? Oh, not the kind of faith they think is important and do a lot of talking and sermoning about, but a different kind of faith. Personal faith, you might say. Faith in a dream or a belief, no matter what people think. And—you know what ruins that faith?"

"No," Danny had said, his eyes very big.

"Knowledge!" cried his uncle. "Too much so-called knowledge which isn't knowledge at all, but hearsay. That's what they're teaching you. In school, other places, every day of your life. I'll tell you when you can come back, Danny: when you're ready to throw most of it overboard. All right?"

He had had to say all right. It was the last time he had ever seen his uncle, but those weren't the last words Averill Jones had spoken to him, for the old man had added as he got up to go: "Don't forget, son. Don't let them pull the wool over your eyes. History is propaganda—from a winner's point of view. If a side lost the war and got stamped on, you never see the war from its point of view. If an idea got out of favor and stamped on, the idea is ridiculed. Don't forget it, son. If you believe something, if you *know* it's right, have faith in it and don't give a mind what people say. Promise?"

Danny, his eyes stinging with tears because somehow he could sense he would never see Uncle Averill again, had said that he promised.

". . . to my nephew, Danny Jones," the lawyer was read-

ing. "So, you see, you'll have to go right down there and look the thing over. Naturally, I'll have to leave the house while you do so and I won't be able to return until you tell me I can—"

"But why?"

"Weren't you listening?"

"I guess I was thinking about my uncle."

"Well, the clause says you're to examine the machine alone, with no one else in the house. It's perfectly legal. If that's what your uncle wanted, that's what he'll get. Are you all set?"

Danny nodded and Tartalion shook his hand solemnly, then left the room. Danny heard the lawyer's footsteps receding, heard the front door open and close, heard a car engine start. Then, slowly, he walked through the living room of his dead uncle's house and across the long, narrow kitchen and to the basement stairs. His hands were very dry and he felt his heart thudding. He was nervous, which surprised him.

But why? he thought, why should it surprise me? All my life, Uncle Averill's basement has been a mystery. Let's face it, Danny-boy, you haven't exactly had an adventurous life. Maybe Uncle Averill was

the biggest adventure in it, with his secret machine and strange disappearances. And maybe Uncle Averill did a good selling job when you were small, because that machine means mystery to you. It's probably not much more than a better mousetrap, but you want to believe it is, don't you? And you're nervous because the way Uncle Averill kept you and anyone else away from his basement when you were a kid makes it a kind of frightening place, even now.

He opened the basement door with a key which the lawyer had given him. Beyond the door were five steps and another door—this one of metal. It had had a time lock in the old days, Danny remembered, but the lock was gone now. The metal door swung ponderously, like the door to a bank vault, and then Danny was on the other side. It was dark down there, but faint light seeped in through small high windows and in a few moments Danny's eyes grew accustomed to the gloom.

The basement was empty except for what looked like a big old steamer trunk in the center of the dusty cement floor.

Danny was disappointed.

He had childhood visions of an intricate maze of machinery cluttering up every available square foot of basement space but now he knew that whatever it was which had taken up so much of Uncle Averill's time could fit in the odd-looking steamer trunk in the center of the floor and thus wasn't too much bigger than a good-size TV set. He walked slowly to the trunk and stood for a few moments over the lid. It was an ancient-looking steamer: Uncle Averill must have owned it since his own youth. Still, just a plain trunk.

Danny was in no hurry to open the lid, which did not seem to be locked. For a few moments, at least, he could shield himself from further disappointment—because now he had a hunch that Uncle Averill's machine was going to be a first-class dud. Maybe, he thought gloomily, Uncle Averill had simply not liked to be with people and had used the ruse of a bank-vault door and an empty steamer-trunk to achieve privacy whenever he felt the need for it.

Remembering the history class, Danny decided that—after all—sometimes that wasn't a bad idea. Finally, he called himself a fool for wait-

ing and threw up the trunk-lid.

A small case was all he saw inside, although the interior of the trunk was larger than he had expected. A man could probably curl up in there quite comfortably. But the case—the case looked exactly like it ought to house a tape-recorder.

Danny reached in and hauled out the case. It was heavy, about as heavy as a tape-recorder ought to be. Danny placed it down on the floor and opened it.

What he saw was a battery-powered tape-recorder. His disappointment increased: Uncle Averill had left a message for him, that was all. Dutifully, however, he set the spools and snapped on the switch.

A voice from yesterday—Uncle Averill's voice—spoke to him.

"Hallo, Danny," it said. "The way the years roll by, I forget exactly how old you are, boy. Seventeen? Eighteen? Twenty? Well, it doesn't matter—if you still believe. If you have faith. Faith in what? Maybe now you're old enough to know. I mean faith in—not having faith. That is, faith in not taking faithfully all the silly items of knowl-

edge they try to cram down your throat in school. See what I mean? Remember what I always said about history, Danny: you get propaganda, is all, from the winning side. If you got faith enough in yourself, Danny, faith enough not to believe everything the history books tell you, that's the kind of faith I mean. Because such a faith gave me the most interesting life a man ever lived, make no mistake about that.

"I'm dead, Danny. Yep, old Uncle Averill is dead. Because this tape-recorder won't be left you in my will until I am dead. But, no regrets, boy. I had a great life. How great—nobody knows. Only you, you're about to find out. Do you believe? Do you believe the way I have in mind? Make no mistake about it now, son. If you don't believe, you might as well burn these spools and go home."

Danny considered. He remembered what had happened in his history class. Wasn't that the sort of faith Uncle Averill had in mind? Faith not to believe in historical fairy tales? Faith to doubt when one ought to doubt? Faith to be skeptical. . . .

"Good," said the voice from the past. "Then you're still

here. Look in front of you, Danny boy. The trunk. The old steamer. Know what it is?"

"No," Danny said, then clamped a hand over his mouth. For a moment he had actually believed he was talking to the dead man.

"It's a time machine," said his Uncle's voice.

There was a silence. The tape went on winding. For a moment, Danny thought that was all. Then the voice continued: "No, your old grand-uncle isn't nuts, Danny. It's a time machine. I know it's a time machine because I used it all my life. You expected some kind of complicated gadget down here, I know. I made everybody think it was a gadget. Going down to your basement and tinkering with a gadget is fine in our culture. Hell's fire, boy, it's approved behavior. But locking a bank-vault door behind you and curling up in a steamer trunk, that isn't approved. Now, is it?"

"I'll tell you about this here time machine, sonny. It isn't a machine at all, in the strict sense of the word. You can see that. It's just—well, an empty box. But it works, and what else ought a fellow to care about.

"Funny how I got it. I was

eighteen or twenty, maybe. And my grand-uncle Daniel gave it to me. Daniel, get me. Daniel to Averill to Daniel. So when you have a grand-nephew, see that his name's Averill, understand? Keep it going, Danny. Because this trunk is old. A lot older than you think.

"And you can travel through time in it. Don't look at me like that, I know what you're thinking. There isn't any such thing as time travel. In the strict sense of the word, it's impossible. You can't resurrect the past or peek into the unborn future. Well, I don't know about the future, but I do know about the past. But you got to have faith, you got to be a kid at heart, Danny. You got to have this dream, see?

"Because you don't travel anywhere. But your mind does, and it's like you wake up in somebody else's body, drawn to him like a magnet, somebody else — *somewhen* else. Your body stays right here, you see. In the trunk. In what they called suspended animation. But you—the real you, the you that knows how to dream and to believe—you go back.

"Don't make the mistake I made at first. It's no dream in the usual sense of the word.

It's real, Danny. You're somebody else back there, all right, but if he gets hurt, you get hurt. If he dies—taps for Danny Jones! You get me?"

The dead man's voice chuckled. "But don't think this means automatically you'll be able to travel through time. Because you got to have the proper attitude. You've got to believe in yourself, and not in all the historical fictions they give you. Now do you understand? If you're skeptical enough and if at the same time you like to dream enough—that's all it takes. Want to try it?"

Suddenly the voice was gone. That was all there was and at first Danny could not believe it. A sense of bitter disappointment enveloped him—not because Uncle Averill had left him nothing but an old steamer trunk but because Uncle Averill had been, to say the least, off his rocker.

The fabulous machine in the basement was—nothing.

Just a steamer trunk and an incredible story about time-traveling.

Danny sighed and began to walk back toward the cellar stairs. He paused. He turned around uncertainly and looked at the trunk. After all, he

had promised; at least he'd promised himself that he'd carry out his peculiar uncle's wishes. Besides, he'd come all the way down here from Whitney College and he ought to at least try the machine.

But there wasn't any machine.

Try the trunk then? There was nothing to try except curling up in it and maybe closing the lid. Uncle Averill was a practical joker, too. It might be just like Uncle Averill to have the lid snap shut and lock automatically so Danny would have to pound his knuckles black and blue until the lawyer heard and came for him.

You see, sonny? would be Uncle Averill's point. You believed me, and you should have known better.

Danny cursed himself and returned to the trunk. He gazed down at the yawning interior for a few seconds, then put first one foot, then the other over the side. He sat down and stared at a peeling blue-paper liner. He rolled over and curled up. The bottom of the trunk was a good fit. He reached up and found a rope dangling down toward him. He pulled the lid down, smiling at his own credulity, and was engulfed in total darkness.

But it would be wonderful, he found himself thinking. It would be the most wonderful thing in the world, to be able to travel through time and see for yourself what really had happened in all the world's colorful ages and to take part in the wildest, proudest adventures of mankind.

He thought, I want to believe. It would be so wonderful to believe.

He also thought about his history class. He did not know it, but his history class was very important. It was crucial. Everything depended on his history class. Because he doubted. He did not want to take Columbus' bravery and intelligence for granted. There were no surviving documents, so why should he?

Maybe Columbus was a third-rater!

Maybe—at least you didn't have to worship him as a hero just because he happened to discover. . . .

Now, what did he discover?

In absolute darkness and a ringing in the ears and far away a dim glowing light and larger and brighter and the whirling whirling spinning flashing I don't believe but strangely somehow I have faith, faith in myself, buzzing, humming, glowing. . . .

The world exploded.

There was a great deal of laughter in the tavern.

At first he thought the laughter was directed at him. Giddily, he raised his head. He saw raw wood rafters, a leaded glass window, a stained and greasy wall, heavy wood-plank tables with heavy chairs and a barbarous-looking crew drinking from heavy clay mugs. One of the mugs was in front of him and he raised it to his lips without thinking.

It was ale, the strongest ale he had ever tasted. He got it down somehow without gagging. The laughter came again, rolling over him like a wave. A serving girl scurried by, skirts flashing, a rough tray of clay mugs balanced expertly on one hand. A man with a sword dangling at his side staggered to his feet drunkenly and clawed at the girl, but she shoved him back into his seat and kept walking.

The third wave of laughter rolled and then there was a brief silence.

"Drink too much, Martin Pinzon?" Danny's companion at the long board-table asked. He was an evil-looking old man with a patch over one eye and a small white spade-shaped beard and unshaven cheeks.

"Not me," Danny said, amazed because the language was unfamiliar to him yet he could both understand and speak it. "What's so funny?" he asked. "Why's everyone laughing?"

The old man's hand slapped his back and the mouth parted to show ugly blackened teeth and the old man laughed so hard spittle spotted his beard. "As if you didn't know," he managed to say. "As if you didn't know, Martin Pinzon. It's that weak-minded sailor again, the one who claims to have a charter for three caravels from the Queen herself. Drunk as Bacchus and there's his pretty little daughter trying to get him to come home again. I tell you, Martin Pinzon, if he isn't. . . ."

But now Danny wasn't listening. He looked around the tavern until he saw the butt of all the laughter. Slowly, drawn irresistably, Martin Pinzon—or Danny Jones—got up and walked over there.

The man was drunk as Bacchus, all right. He was a man perhaps somewhat taller than average. He had a large head with an arrogant beak of a nose dominating the face, but the mouth was weak and irresolute. He stared drunkenly at a beautiful girl who could

not have been more than seventeen.

The girl was saying, "Please, papa. Come back to the hotel with me. Papa, don't you realize you're sailing tomorrow?"

"Gowananlemebe," the man mumbled.

"Papa. Please. The Queen's charter—"

"I was drunk when I took it and drunk when I examined those three stinking caravels and—" he leaned forward as if to speak in deepest confidence, but his drunken voice was still very loud— "and drunk when I said the world was round. I—"

"You hear that?" someone cried. "Old Chris was drunk when he said the world was round!"

"He must a' been!" someone else shouted. Everyone laughed.

"Come on, papa," the girl pleaded. She wore a shawl over her dress and another shawl on her head. Her blonde hair barely peeked out, and she was beautiful. She tried to drag her father to his feet by one arm, but he was too heavy for her.

She looked around the room defiantly as the laughter surged again. "Brave men!" she mocked. "A bunch of stay-at-homes. Won't somebody

help me? Papa sails tomorrow."

"Papa sails tomorrow," said someone, miming her desperate tones. "Didn't you know that papa sails tomorrow?"

"Not sailing anyplace at all," the father mumbled. "World isn't round. Drunk. Think I want to fall over the edge? Think I—"

"Oh, papa," moaned the girl. "Won't someone help me to—" And she tugged again at the man's arm— "to get him to bed."

A big man nearby boomed, "I'll help you t'bed, me lass, but it won't be with your old father. Eh, mates?" he cried, and the tavern echoed with laughter. The big man got up and went over to the girl. "Now, listen, lass," he said, taking hold of her arm. "Why don't you forget this drunken slob of a father and—"

Crack! Her hand blurred at his cheek, struck it like a pistol shot. The big man blinked his eyes and grinned. "So you have spirit, do you? Well, it's more than I can say for that father of yours, too yellow and too drunk to carry out the Queen of Castile's bid—"

The hand flashed out again but this time the big man caught it in one of his own and twisted sideways against

the girl, forcing her back against the table's edge. "I like my girls to struggle," he said, and the girl's face went white as she suddenly let herself go limp in his arms.

The man grinned. "Oh I like 'em limp, me lass. When they're pretty as a rose, like you, who's to care?"

"Papa!" the girl screamed. The big man's face hovered over hers, blotting out the oil-lamp lights, the thick lips all but slaverling. . . .

"Just a minute, man!" Danny cried, striding boldly to them. Hardly pausing in his efforts to kiss the again struggling girl, the big man swatted back with one enormous arm and sent Danny reeling. Whoever he was, he was a popular figure. The laughter was still louder now. Everyone was having a great time, at Danny's expense now.

Danny crashed into a chair, upending it. A bowl of soup came crashing down, the heavy bowl splintering, the hot contents scalding him. He stood up and heard the girl scream. Instinctively, he grasped two legs of the heavy chair and hefted it. Then he sprinted back across the room.

"Behind you, Pietro!" a voice cried, and at the last

moment the big man whirled and faced Danny, then lunged to one side, taking the girl with him.

Danny couldn't check his arms, which had carried the heavy chair overhead. It came down with a crash against the edge of the big plank table. The chair shattered in Danny's arms. One leg flew up and struck the big man in the face, though, bringing blood just below the cheek bone. He bellowed in surprise and pain and came lumbering toward Danny.

Danny was aware of the girl cowering to one side, aware that another of the chair's legs was still grasped in his right hand. He was but a boy, he found himself thinking quickly, desperate. If the giant grabbed him, grabbed him just once, the fight would be over. The man was twice his size, twice his weight. Yet he had to do something to help the girl. . . .

The giant came at him. The big arms lifted over the heavy, brutal face. . . . And Danny drove under them with the chair-leg, jabbing the tip of it against the man's enormous middle. Pietro—for such was the man's name—sagged a few inches, the breath rushing, heavy with garlic, from his mouth. But

still, he got his great hands about Danny's throat and began to squeeze.

Danny saw the wood rafters, the window, a bargirl standing, mouth open, watching them, the drunken man and his daughter, then a blurry, watery confusion as his eyes went dim. He was conscious of swinging the club, of striking something, of extending the club out as far as it would go and then slamming it back toward himself, striking something which he hoped was Pietro's head. He felt his mouth going slack and wondered if his tongue were hanging out. Exerting all his strength he struck numbly, mechanically, desperately with the chair-leg.

And slowly, the constriction left his throat. Something struck against his middle, almost knocking him down. Something pushed against his legs, backing him against the table. He looked down. His eyes were watery, his throat burning. The giant Pietro lay, breathing stertorously, at his feet.

A small hand grabbed his. "Father will come now," a voice said. "I don't—don't even know who you are, but I want to thank you. I thank you for myself and the Queen, and God, senor. You better

come quickly, with us. Does it hurt much?"

Danny tried to talk. His voice rasped in his throat. The girl squeezed his hand and together with her and the drunken man who was her father, he left the tavern. The giant Pietro was just getting up and shaking his fist at them slowly. . . .

It was a small top-floor room in an old waterfront building in the Spanish port of Palos. Or, Danny corrected himself, the Castillian port of Palos. Because, in this year of our Lord 1492, Spain had barely become a unified country.

"Are you feeling better, Martin Pinzon?" the beautiful girl asked him.

He had given the name he had heard, Martin Pinzon, as his own. The room was very hot. The August night outside was hot too and sultry and starless. The girl's father was resting now, breathing unevenly. The girl's name was Nina. One of the small caravels in her father's three-ship fleet was named after her. Her full name was Nina Columbus.

Nina brought another wet cloth and covered Danny's swollen throat with it. "Does it hurt much?" she said, and,

for the tenth time, "we have no money to thank you with, senor."

"Any man would have—"

"But you were the only one. The only—never mind. Martin, listen. I have no right to trouble you, but . . . it's father. Tomorrow is the second day of August, you see, and it is all over Palos that tomorrow he sails with the Queen's charter. . . ."

"Then if you're worrying about that big man, Pietro, you can forget it. If you're sailing, I mean."

"That's just it," Nina said deserately. "Father doesn't want to sail. Martin, tell me, do you believe the world is round?"

Danny nodded very soberly. "Yes, Nina," he told her softly. "The world is round. I believe it."

"My father doesn't! Funny, isn't it, Martin?" she said in a voice which told him she did not think it was funny at all. "All Spain—and Genoa too—think that tomorrow morning my father, Christopher Columbus, will journey to the unexplored west confident that he will arrive, after a long voyage, in the East—when really my father, this same Christopher Columbus, lies here in a drunken stupor because he lacks the courage

to face his convictions and . . . oh, Martin!" Her voice broke, her pretty face crumpled. She sobbed into her hands. Gently, Danny stroked her back.

"There now, take it easy," he said. "Your father will sail. I know he'll sail. Do you believe the world to be round, little Nina?"

"Yes. Oh yes, yes, yes!"

"He will sail. He will prove it and be famous. I know he will."

"Oh, Martin. You sound so sure of yourself. I wish I could. . . ."

"Nina, listen. Your father will sail."

"You'll help us you mean?"

"Yes. All right, I'll help you. Now, get some sleep if you want to wake up and say goodbye to him in the morning. Because I'll be getting him up before the sun to—"

"Are you a sailing man too? Are you going with him?"

"Well. . . ."

"Wait! Martin, I remember you now. Martin Pinzon. At the meeting of the organization to prove the Earth's round shape. You! You were there. And once, once when he was not drunk, father said that a Don Pinzon would command one of our three ships, the Nina it was, the caravel

which bears my name. Are you this Don Pinzon?"

Slowly, Danny nodded. He remembered his history now. The Nina *had* been commanded by one Don Pinzon, Don Martin Pinzon! And he was now this Martin Pinzon, he, Danny Jones. Which meant he was going with Columbus to discover a new world! A nineteen year old American youth going to witness the single most important event in American history. . . .

"Yes," Danny said slowly, "I am Don Pinzon."

"But — but you're so young!"

Danny shrugged. "I have seen more of the world than you would believe, Nina."

"The Western Sea? You have been out on the Western Sea, as far as the Canary Islands, perhaps?" she asked in an awed voice.

"I know the Western Sea," he said. "Trust me."

She came very close. She looked long in his eyes. "I trust you, Martin. Oh yes, I trust you. Listen, Martin. I'm going. I'm going with you. I have to go with you."

"But a girl—"

"He is my father. I love him, Martin. He needs me. Martin, don't try to stop me. I want you to help me aboard, to see that he . . . oh, Martin,

you'll have so much to do. Because the rest of our crew—some of them being hired even now by the three caravel pursers—will be a crew of cut-throats and n'er-do-wells embarking into the unknown because they have utterly nothing to lose. Father needs you because the others won't care.

"The three caravels will sail west," Danny told her. "Believe me, they'll sail west. Now, get some sleep."

Her face was still very close. Her eyes filled with tears, but they were not tears of sadness. She took his cheeks in her hands and kissed him softly on the lips. She smiled at him, her own lips trembling.

"Martin," she said.

His arms moved. They went around her, drew the softness of her close. She murmured something, but he did not hear it. His lips found hers a second time, fiercely. His hands her shoulder, her throat, her. . . .

"Flat," Columbus mumbled. "Flat. Abs'lutely flat. The Earth is—flat as a pancake. . . ."

"Oh, Martin!" Nina cried.

It was raining in the morning. A hard, driving rain, pelting down on the seaport

of Palos. The three caravels floated side by side in the little harbor and a large, derisive crowd had gathered. The crowd erupted into noisy laughter when Columbus and his little party appeared on foot.

"I need a drink," Columbus whispered. "I can't go through with it."

"Father," Nina said. "We're with you. I'm here. Martin is here."

"I can't go—"

"You've got to go through with it! For yourself and for the world. Now, stand straight, father. They're looking at you. They're all looking at you."

Columbus, thought Danny. The intrepid voyager who had discovered a new world! He smiled grimly. Columbus, the history books should have said, the drunken sot who didn't even have the courage to face his own convictions.

They walked ahead through the ridiculing crowd. Danny's throat was still sore. He was not frightened, though. He possibly was the only man in the crew who was not frightened. The others didn't care what their destination was, true: but they wanted to reach it alive. Danny knew the journey would end in success. The end of the journey

meant nothing to him. It was written in history. It was. . . .

Unless, he suddenly found himself thinking, I came back here to write it. He grinned at his own bravado. What would they have said in freshman psych—that was practically paranoid thinking. As if Danny Jones, Whitney College, Virginia, U.S.A., could have anything to do with the success or failure of Columbus' journey.

They reached the small skiff that would take them out to the tiny fleet of caravels. The crowd hooted and jeered.

". . . going to drop off the edge of the world, Columbus."

"If the monsters don't get you first."

"Or the storms and whirlpools."

Columbus gripped Nina's hand. Martin-Danny took his other arm firmly and steered him toward the prow of the skiff. "Easy now, skipper," Danny said.

"I can't—"

"There's wine on the Santa Maria," Danny whispered. "Much wine—to make you forget. Come on!"

"And I'm going, father," Nina said. "Whether you go or not."

"You!" Columbus gasped. "A girl. You, going—"

"With Martin Pinzon. If— if my own father can't look after me, then Martin can."

"But you—" Danny began.

"Be quiet, please," she whispered as Columbus climbed stiffly into the skiff. "It may be the only way, Martin. He—he loves me. I guess I'm the only thing he cares about. If he knows I'm going."

"To the Santa Maria!" Columbus told the rowers as Danny and Nina got into the skiff.

"To the New World!" cried Danny melodramatically.

"What did you say?" Nina asked him.

His face colored. "I mean, to the Indies! To the Indies!"

The skiff bobbed out across the harbor toward the three waiting caravels. Departure time had arrived.

Two hours later, they were underway.

The sea was calm as glass, green as emerald. The three caravels, after a journey of several days, had reached the Canary Island where additional provisions and fresh water were to be had.

"This," said Columbus, waving his arms to take in the chain of islands. "This is as far as a mere man has a right to go. There is nothing

further, can't you see? Can't you?"

He was sober. Danny had come over in a skiff from the Nina to see that he remained sober at least for the loading and the departure. It was as if he, Danny, was going to preserve Columbus' name for history—single-handed if necessary.

"We will not go on," Columbus said. "We're going back. The only way to the Indies is around the Cape of Storms, around Africa. I tell you—"

"That's enough, father," Nina said. "We. . . ."

"I'm in command here," Columbus told them. It surprised Danny. Usually, the drunken sailor was not so self-assertive. Then it occurred to Danny that it wasn't merely self-assertiveness: it was fear.

Danny called over the mate, a one-legged man named Juan, who walked with a jaunty stride despite his peg leg. "You take orders from Columbus?" Danny said. "Would you take orders from me?"

Juan shook his head, smiling. "You command aboard the Nina only, Martin Pinzon. I heard what the Captain said. If he wants to go back and give up this fool scheme, it's all right with me. And you

know the rest of the crew will say the same."

Nina looked at Danny hopelessly. She said, "Then, then it's no use?"

Danny whispered fiercely, "Your father loves you very much?"

"Yes, but—"

"And doesn't want to see anything happen to you?"

"But—"

"And believes the world is flat and if you sail far enough west you'll fall off?"

"But I—"

"Then you're coming with me aboard the Nina!"

Columbus gasped, "What did you say?"

"She's coming with me, on the Nina. If you don't want to find the western route to the Indies, we will. Right, Nina?" he said, taking her hand and moving to where the rope-ladder dangled over the side of the Santa Maria to the skiff below.

"Don't take her from this deck," Columbus ordered.

Danny ignored him. "Don Juan!" cried Columbus, and the peg-leg came toward Danny.

"I'm sorry, Don Martin," he said, "but—"

Still holding Nina's hand, Martin stiff-armed him out of the way and ran for the side. Someone jerked the rope-lad-

der out of reach and someone else leaped on Martin. For, he was Martin now, Martin Pinzon. His own identity seemed submerged far below the surface, as if somehow he could look on all this without risking anything. He knew that he was merely a defense mechanism, to ward off fear: for, it wasn't true. If Martin Pinzon were hurt, *he* would be hurt.

He hurled the man from his back. Nina screamed as a cutlass flashed in the sun. Martin-Danny ducked, felt the blade whizz by overhead.

"Jump!" Martin - Danny cried.

"But I can't swim!"

"I can. I'll save you." It was Danny again, completely Danny. He felt himself arise to the surface, submerging Martin-Pinzon. Because the Spaniard probably couldn't swim at all, and if Danny made promises, if was Danny who must fulfill them.

He squeezed Nina's hand. He went up on the side—and over. The water seemed a very long way down. They hit it finally with a great splash.

Down they went and down, into the warm murky green depths. Down—and finally up. Danny's head broke surface. He was only yards from the skiff. He had never let go

of Nina's hand, but now he did, getting a lifeguard's hold on her. He struck out for the skiff.

Fifteen minutes later, they were aboard the Nina. "I command here," Danny told the crew. "Is that correct?"

"Aye, sir," said Don Hernan, the mate.

"Even if Columbus tells you different?"

"Columbus?" spat Don Hernan. "That drunkard is in command of the Santa Maria, not the Nina. We follow Martin Pinzon here."

"Even if I give one set of orders and Columbus another?"

"Even then, my commander. Yes."

"Then we're sailing west," Danny cried. "Up anchor! Hurry."

"But I—" Nina began.

"Don't you see? He thinks I'm abducting you. Or he thinks I'm sailing west with you to certain death. He will follow with the Santa Maria and the Pinta, trying to rescue you. And we'll reach the Indies. Columbus will sail across the Western Sea to save his daughter, but what's the difference *why* he'll sail. The important thing is, Queen Isabella gave him the charter and the caravels and with

them he's making history. You see?"

"I . . . I think so," Nina said doubtfully.

A heady wind sprang up. The square-rigged sails billowed. The Nina began to surge forward—into the unknown West.

Tackle creaked aboard the nearby Santa Maria and Pinta. The two other caravels came in pursuit. But they won't catch us, Martin knew. They won't catch us until we reach—Hispaniola. And then, pursuit will be no more. Then, it will no longer matter and we'll all be heroes. . . .

Which is the way it turned out—almost.

The Santa Maria and Pinta pursued all through August and September and into October, but the Nina kept its slim lead. The ships were never out of sight of one another and once or twice Columbus even hailed them, imploring them to return to Spain with him. When they ignored him, his deep voice boomed to his own crew and the crew of the Pinta: "Then sail on, sail on!" It was these words, Danny knew, that history would record. Not the others.

One morning in October, he awoke with a start. Some-

thing had disturbed his sleep—something. . . .

"Good morning, captain," a voice said.

He looked up. It was a giant of a man, with a hard face and brutal-looking eyes. He knew that face. Pietro! The giant of the tavern.

"But you—"

"I was aboard all the time, my captain," Pietro said. "An auxiliary rower. You never knew." He said nothing else. He lunged at Martin's bunk—for I'm Martin again, Danny thought—a knife gleaming in his big hand.

Martin - Danny sat up, bringing the covers with him, hurling them like a cloak at Pietro. The giant's knife-hand caught in the covers and Danny swung to his feet, shoving the big man. Pietro stumbled into the bunk, then lashed around quickly, unexpectedly, the knife loose again. Danny felt it grating across his ribs hotly, seeringly. He staggered and almost fell, but somehow made it to the door and on deck. He needed room. Facing that knife in the close confines of the cabin, he was a dead man and knew it.

He hit the stairs and headed for the deck. He reached the door—tugged. It held

fast. He heard Pietro's laughter, then threw himself to one side. The knife thudded into the wood alongside Danny's shoulder.

Then the door came open, throwing him back. He stumbled, regained his balance, plunged outside. With a roar, Pietro followed him, knife again in hand.

Danny backed away slowly. Only a few crew members were on deck now, and a watch high up in the crow's nest. The watch was crying in an almost - delirious voice: "Land, land! Land ho-oo!" But Martin-Danny hardly heard the words. Pietro came at him—

Suddenly Don Hernan was in front of him. Don Hernan's hand flipped up and then down and a knife arced toward Danny. He caught it by the haft, swung to face the giant. But, he thought, I don't know how to use a knife. I'm Danny Jones, I . . .

Pietro leaped, the knife down, held loosely at his side, underhanded, ready to slash and rip. Danny sidestepped and Pietro went by in a rush. Danny waited.

Pietro came back carefully this time, crouching, balanced easily on the balls of his feet. For all his size, he fought with the grace of a dancer.

Danny felt warm wetness where the blood was seeping from his ribs. Feet pounded as more of the crew came on deck in response to the watch's delirious words. Instead of crowding at the prow, though, they formed a circle around Danny and Pietro. Danny thought: But I'm the captain. The captain. They ought to help me . . . they . . . He knew though that they would not. They were a fierce proud people and the law of single combat would apply even to the captain who had piloted them across an unknown ocean.

Pietro came by, attempting to slash with his knife from outside. Danny moved quickly—not quick enough. The knife point caught his arm this time. He felt his hand go numb. His own knife clattered to the deck as blood cozed from his biceps.

Once more Pietro charged him. Weaponless, Danny waited. Pietro was laughing, sure of himself—

Careless.

Danny slipped aside as Pietro brought the knife around in a wicked swipe. He spun with it and when he came around Danny was waiting for him. He drove his left fist into the great belly and his right to the big, bearded

jaw. Pietro slumped, disbelief in his eyes. He swung the knife again but only succeeded in wrapping his giant arm around Danny. He bent his head, shook it to clear it of the sting of Danny's blows. And Danny rabbit-punched him.

Pietro went down heavily and someone shouted. "The face! Kick him in the face!"

Wearily, Danny shook his head. He went with Nina to the rail and saw the green palm-fringed island of the New World. Nina smiled at him, then ripped something from what she was wearing and began to bandage his ribs, his arm.

They heard a splash. Danny looked around, saw Don Hernan and a member of the crew gazing serenely down. Pietro was down there, where they had tossed him. For a while the body floated, then the limbs splashed wildly as Pietro regained consciousness. He drifted back away from the ship. He went under, and came up. He went under again, and stayed under. . . .

"The Indies," Nina said.

"The Indies," Danny said. He did not make the distinction between east and west. They must learn for themselves.

The Pinta and the Santa Maria came up alongside. All thoughts of pursuit were gone. Columbus waved. He was very close now on the deck of the Santa Maria. There was something in his face, something changed. Columbus was a new man now. He had been shamed. He had followed his daughter and Martin Pinzon across an unknown ocean and he was changed now. Somehow, Danny knew he could now make voyages on his own.

"Martin," Nina whispered. "They may say it was father. But it was you. I'll know in my heart, it was you."

Danny nodded. She put her arm around his shoulder, and kissed him. He liked this slim girl—he liked her immensely, and it wasn't right. She wasn't his, not really. She was Martin Pinzon's. He let the Spaniard come to the surface, willed his own mind back and down and away. She's all yours, Pinzon, he told the other mind in his body. She—and this world. I'm a—stranger here.

But once more he kissed Nina, fiercely, with passion and longing.

"Goodybe, my darling," he said.

"Goodybe! What—"

He let Martin Pinzon take

it from there. "Hello," said Martin Pinzon. "I mean, hello forever, darling."

She laughed. "Goodbye to your bachelorhood, you mean."

"Yes," he said. "Yes."

But it was Martin Pinzon talking now. Completely Martin Pinzon.

He was back in his grand-uncle's basement. He was in the trunk and he felt stiff. Mostly, his right arm and the right ribs felt stiff. He felt his shirt. It was caked with blood.

Proof, he thought. If I needed proof. What happened to Pinzon happened to me.

He stood up. He felt weak, but knew he would be all right. He knew about Columbus now. At first, a weak drunkard. But after the first voyage, thanks to Martin Pinzon and Nina, an intrepid voyager. For history said Columbus would make four voyages to the New World—and four he would make.

Danny went outside, to where the lawyer was waiting for him. The trunk was Danny's now, the time trunk. And he would use it again, often. He knew that now, and it was wrong to deflate a dream.

Columbus was a hero. He would never say otherwise again.

THE END

THE JUDAS VALLEY

(Continued from page 21)

after it had been fairly safely established that no apparent harm was going to come to them. Wayne and Sherri were both in the crew that went outside to set up the detector.

"You man the detector plate," said Major MacDougal, who was in charge of the group, turning to Wayne.

He put his hand on the plate and waited for the guide coordinates to be set. MacDougal fumbled at the base of the detector for a moment, and the machine began picking up eloptic radiations.

Wayne now looked down at the detector plate. "Here we

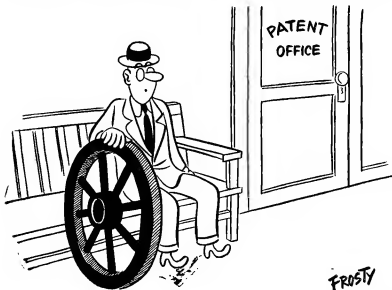
are," he said. "The dial's oscillating between four and eight, all right. The stuff's here."

MacDougal whistled gently. "It's really sending, isn't it!" He pointed toward the mountaintop. "From up there, too. It's going to be a nice climb. Okay, pack the detector up and let's get back inside."

They entered the airlock and passed on into the ship.

"The D-N beryllium up there, sir," Major MacDougal said. "It's going to be a devil of a job to get up to find the stuff."

"That's what Captain



Wayne's here for," Petersen said. "Captain, what do you think? Can you get up here?"

"It would have been easier to bring along a helicopter," Wayne said wryly. "Pity the things don't fit into spaceships. But I think I can get up there. I'd like to try surveying the lay of the land, first. I want to know all the possible routes before I start climbing."

"Good idea," Petersen said. "I'll send you out with three men to do some preliminary exploring. Boggs! Manetti! MacPherson! Suit up and get with it!"

Wayne strode toward the spacesuit locker, took out his suit, and donned it. Instead of the normal space boots, he put on the special metamagnetic boots for mountain climbing. The little reactors in the back of the calf activated the thick metal sole of each boot so that it would cling tightly to the metallic rock of the mountain. Unlike ordinary magnetism, the metamagnetic field acted on all metals, even when they were in combination with other elements.

His team of three stood before him in the airlock room. He knew all three of them fairly well from Earthside;

they were capable, level-headed men, and at least one—Boggs—had already been out in the valley surveying once, and so knew the area pretty well.

He pulled on the boots and looked up. "We're not going to climb the mountain this time, men. We'll just take a look around it to decide which is the best way."

"You have any ideas, sir?" Sergeant Boggs asked.

"From looking at the photographs, I'd guess that the western approach is the best. But I may be wrong. Little details are hard to see from five hundred miles up, even with the best of instruments, and there may be things in our way that will make the west slope impassible. If so, we'll try the southern side. It looks pretty steep, but it also seems rough enough to offer plenty of handholds."

"Too bad we couldn't have had that helicopter you were talking about," said Boggs.

Wayne grinned. "With these winds? They'd smash us against the side of the mountain before we'd get up fifty feet. You ought to know, Sergeant—you've been out in them once already."

"They're not so bad down in this valley, sir," Boggs said. "The only time you real-

ly notice them is when you climb the escarpment at the northern end. They get pretty rough up there."

Wayne nodded. "You can see what kind of a job we'll have. Even with metamagnetic boots and grapples, we'll still have to use the old standbys." He looked at the men. "Okay; we're all ready. Let's go."

They unhooked four of the six tabs from the wall and donned them. Then they moved on into the airlock and closed the inner door. The air was pumped out, just as though the ship were in space or on a planet with a poisonous atmosphere. As far as anyone knew, the atmosphere of Fomalhaut V actually was poisonous. Some of the tension had relaxed after a week spent in safety, but there was always the first expedition to consider; no one took chances.

When all the air had been removed, a bleeder valve allowed the outer air to come into the chamber. Then the outer door opened, and the four men went down the ladder to the valley floor.

Wayne led the way across the sand in silence. The four men made their way toward the slope on the western side of the valley. Overhead, the

bright globe of Fomalhaut shed its orange light over the rugged landscape.

When they reached the beginning of the slope, Wayne stopped and looked upwards. "Doesn't look easy," he grunted. "Damned rough hill, matter of fact. MacPherson, do you think you could make it to the top?"

Corporal MacPherson was a small, wiry man who had the reputation of being a first-rank mountaineer. He had been a member of the eighteenth Mount Everest Party, and had been the second of that party to reach the summit of the towering peak.

"Sure I can, sir," he said confidently. "Shall I take the rope?"

"Go ahead. You and Manetti get the rope to the top, and Sergeant Boggs and I will follow up."

"Righto, sir."

Corporal MacPherson reached his gloved hands forward and contracted his fingers. The tiny microswitches in his gloves actuated the relays, and his hands clung to the rock. Then he put his boots against the wall and began to move up the steep escarpment.

Private Manetti followed after him. The two men were lashed together by the light

plastisteel cable. The sergeant held the end of the cable in his hands, waiting for the coil to be paid out.

Wayne watched the two men climb, while a chill wind whipped down out of the mountains and raised the sand in the valley. It was less than eighty feet to the precipice edge above, but it was almost perpendicular, and as they climbed, the buffeting winds began to press against their bodies with ever-increasing force.

They reached the top and secured the rope, and then they peered over the edge and signalled that Wayne and the sergeant should start up.

"We're coming," Wayne shouted, and returned the signal. It was at that instant that he felt something slam against the sole of his heavy metamagnetic boot. It was as though something had kicked him savagely on the sole of his right foot.

He winced sharply at the impact. Then, somewhat puzzled he looked down at the boot. He felt something move under the sand. He tried to step back, and almost tripped. It was as though his right foot were stuck firmly to the sand!

He pushed himself back, and with a tremendous heave

managed to pull himself free. He braced his body against the cliff, lifted his foot, and looked at it.

Hanging from his boot sole was one of the ugliest monstrosities he had ever seen, unusually grotesque.

It was about the size and shape of a regulation football, and was covered with a wrinkled, reddish hide. At one end was a bright red gash of a mouth studded with greenish, gnashing teeth. From the other end of the creature's body protruded a long, needle-like projection which had imbedded itself in the metal sole of Wayne's boot.

"Good God! If I'd been wearing ordinary boots, that thing would have stuck clear into my foot!"

He hefted the weighted pick with one hand and swung, catching the monster with the point. It sank in and ripped through the creature, spilling red-orange blood over the sand. Shuddering a little, Wayne put his other foot on the dead thing and pulled his right boot free of the needle beak.

He started to say something, but he had a sudden premonition that made him look up in time. Sergeant Boggs put both hands against

the Captain's shoulder and pushed.

"What the hell?" Wayne asked in surprise as he felt the shove. He almost fell to the sand, but he had had just enough warning to allow him to keep his balance. He put out a foot and staggered wildly.

A sudden strange noise caused him to turn and look back. Five needles were jabbing viciously up out of the sand in the spot where he would have fallen.

"You out of your head, Boggs?" he started to ask—but before the last word was out of his mouth, the sergeant charged in madly and tried to push him over again. He was fighting like a man gone berserk—which he was.

Wayne grabbed him by the wrist and flipped him desperately aside. The sergeant fell, sprawled out for a moment on the sand, then bounced to his feet again. His eyes were alight with a strange, terrifying flame.

Silently, he leaped for Wayne. The captain slammed his fist forward, sending it crashing into Boggs' midsection. The sergeant came back with a jab to the stomach that pushed Wayne backward. Again the deadly needles flicked up from the ground,

but they did not strike home.

Wayne gasped for breath and reached out for Boggs. Boggs leaped on him, trying to push Wayne down where the beaks could get to him. Wayne sidestepped, threw Boggs off balance, and clubbed down hard with his fist.

Boggs wandered dizzily for a second before Wayne's other fist came blasting in, knocking the breath out of him. A third blow, and the sergeant collapsed on the sand.

Wayne paused and caught his breath. The sergeant remained unconscious. Wayne shook his head uncertainly, wondering what had come over the mild-mannered Boggs. A chilling thought struck him: *was this what happened to the crew of the Mavis?*

He looked up the cliff, where the other two men were still peering over the edge.

"MacPherson! Manetti! Come down! We're going back to the ship!"

He heaved the unconscious body of Sergeant Boggs over his shoulder like a potato-sack, and waited for the two men to come down. They drew near.

"Boggs must have gone out of his head," Wayne said. "He

jumped me like a madman."

They had nothing to say, so he turned and began to trudge back to the *Lord Nelson*, trying to assemble the facts in his mind. They followed alongside.

What was behind the attack? After seeing the monster, why had Boggs attempted to push his superior officer over into the sand? There were other little beasts under that sand; why would Boggs want one of them—there seemed to be dozens—to jab him with its needle of a beak?

And what were the beastly little animals, anyway?

There were no answers. But the answers would have to come, soon.

He tossed Boggs into the airlock and waited for the others to catch up. They climbed up the ladder and said nothing as the airlock went through its cycle and the antibacterial spray covered them.

Colonel Petersen looked at him across the desk and put the palms of his hands together. "Then, as I understand it, Captain, Sergeant Boggs tried to push you over into the sand when this—ah—*monster* jabbed you in the foot?"

"That's right, sir," Wayne

said. He felt uncomfortable. This wasn't a formal court-martial; it was simply an inquiry into the sergeant's actions. Charges would be preferred later, if there were any to be preferred.

Sergeant Boggs stood stolidly on the far side of the room. A livid bruise along his jaw testified to the struggle that had taken place. One eye was puffed, and his expression was an unhappy one. Near him, MacPherson and Private Manetti stood stiffly at attention.

The colonel looked at Boggs. "What's your side of the story, Sergeant?"

The non-com's face didn't change. "Sir, the captain's statement isn't true."

"*What's that?*" Wayne asked angrily.

"Quiet, Captain," Petersen said. "Go ahead, Boggs."

The sergeant licked his bruised lips. "I was about to start up the rope when, for no reason at all, he struck me in the stomach. Then he hit me again a few more times, and I passed out."

"Did he say anything when he did this?" the Colonel asked.

"No, sir."

Wayne frowned. What was the sergeant trying to do? What the devil was he up to?

"Corporal MacPherson," the colonel said, "Did you witness the fight?"

"Yes, sir," the small man said, stepping a pace forward.

"Describe it."

"Well, sir, we were up on top of the cliff, and we called—or rather, I called for the captain and the sergeant to come on up. Sergeant Boggs took a hold of the rope and then the captain hit him in the belly, sir. He hit him twice more and the sergeant fell down. Then the captain told us to come down, which we did, sir. That was all." He gestured with his hands to indicate he had no more to say.

Wayne could hardly believe his ears. Making an effort, he managed to restrain himself.

"Private Manetti, do you have anything to add to that?" the colonel asked.

"No, sir. It happened just like that, sir. We both seen the entire thing. That's the way it happened. The captain hauled off and let him have it."

The colonel swivelled around and let his cold eyes rest on Wayne. "Captain, you have stated that Sergeant Boggs did not talk to either of these two men after you struck him. That eliminates any collusion."

"Yes, sir," Wayne said stonily.

"I talked to both men separately, and they tell substantially the same story. The records of all three of these men are excellent. The sergeant claims he never saw any monster of the type you describe, and the group I sent out to check says that there is no body of any alien animal anywhere near the spot. How do you explain the discrepancies between your story and theirs?"

Wayne glared angrily at the three men. "They're lying, sir," he said evenly. "I don't know why they're doing it. The whole thing took place exactly as I told you."

"I find that very difficult to believe, Captain."

"Is that a formal accusation, sir?"

Petersen shrugged and rubbed his hands against his iron-grey temples. "Captain," he said finally, "you have a very fine record. You have never before been known to strike an enlisted man for any cause whatever. I hold that in your favor."

"Thank you, sir."

"On the other hand, the evidence here definitely indicates that your story is not quite true. Now, we know

that Lieutenant Jervis acted peculiarly after the crew of the *Mavis* met its mysterious end, and the Medical Corps thinks that whatever is causing the deaths could also cause mental confusion. Therefore, I am remanding you to the custody of the Medical Corps for observation. You'll be kept in close confinement until this thing is cleared up."

Wayne frowned bitterly. "Yes, sir," he said.

Peter Wayne sat in his cell in the hospital sector and stared at the wall in confusion. What in blazes was going on? What possible motive would three enlisted men have to frame him in this way? It didn't make any sense.

Was it possible that he really *had* gone off his rocker? Had he imagined the little beast under the sand?

He lifted his foot and looked again at the sole. There it was: a little pit about an eighth of an inch deep.

The colonel had explained it away easily enough, saying that he might possibly have stepped on a sharp rock. Wayne shook his head. He knew he wasn't nuts. But what the hell was going on?

There were no answers.

But he knew that the eventual answer, when it came, would have something to do with the mystery of the *Mavis*, eight corpses.

It was late that afternoon when Sherri James came storming into the hospital sector. She was wearing a spacesuit, and she was brandishing a pass countersigned by Colonel Petersen himself. She was determined to enter.

"The medics didn't want to let me in," she explained. "But I told them I'd wear a spacesuit if it would make them any happier."

"Sherri! What the devil are you doing here?"

"I just wanted to check on you," she said. Her voice sounded oddly distorted coming over the speaker in the helmet. "You're supposed to have blown your wig or something. Did you?"

"No. Of course not."

"I didn't think so." She unscrewed her helmet quickly. "Listen, Peter, there's something funny going on aboard this ship."

"I've known that a long time," he said.

"I think Boggs and those other two are trying to frame you," she said, her voice low. "Do you know of anyone aboard named Masters?"

"Masters?" Wayne repeat-

ed. "Not that I know of—why?"

"Well, I overheard Boggs talking to one of the other men. I didn't hear very clearly, but it sounded as though he said: 'We've got to get Moore out and turn him over to Masters.' Bill Moore is one of my computermen — tall, skinny fellow."

Wayne nodded, frowning. "Yeah, but who is Masters? This is the queerest thing I ever heard of."

Footsteps sounded in the corridor outside.

"Better put your helmet on," Wayne advised. "Whoever's coming might not like to see you this way."

Quickly, she slipped the helmet back on. "I don't know what's going on," she said. "But I intend to find out."

One of the medics entered the cell without knocking and came up to Sherri. "You'll have to go now, Lieutenant," he said. "We're going to perform some tests on the captain now."

Sherri bristled. "Tests? What kind of tests?"

"Nothing very serious," the medic said. "Just a routine checkup to clarify some points we're interested in."

"All right," Sherri said. "You won't find anything the

matter with him." She left.

"Come with me, Captain," said the medic politely. He unlocked the cell door and, equally politely, drew a needle-beam pistol. "Don't try anything, please, sir. I have my orders."

Silently, Wayne followed the medic into the lab. Several other medics were standing around watching him, with Stevelman, the head man, in the back.

"Over this way, Captain," Stevelman called.

There was a box sitting on a table in the middle of the room. It was full of sand.

"Give me your hand, please, Captain," the medic said tonelessly.

In a sudden flash of insight, Wayne realized what was in the box. He thought fast but moved slowly. He held out his hand, but just as the medic took it, he twisted suddenly away.

His hand flashed out and grasped the other's wrist in a steely grip. The medic's fingers tightened on the needle-beam, and managed to pull the trigger. A bright beam flared briefly against the lab's plastalloy floor, doing nothing but scorching it slightly. Wayne's other hand balled into a fist and came up hard against the medic's jaw.

He grabbed the needle-beam pistol from the collapsing man's limp hand and had the other three men covered before the slugged medic had finished sagging to the floor.

"All of you! Raise your hands!"

They paid no attention to him. Instead of standing where they were, they began to move toward him. Wayne swore and, with a quick flip of his thumb, turned the beam down to low power and pulled the trigger three times in quick succession.

The three men fell as though they'd been pole-axed, knocked out by the low-power beam.

"The whole ship's gone crazy," he murmured softly, looking at the three men slumped together on the lab floor. "Stark, staring, raving nuts."

He took one step and someone jumped him from behind. The needle-beam pistol spun from his hand and slithered across the floor as Wayne fell under the impact of the heavy body. Apparently the whole Medical Corps was out to knock him down today.

He twisted rapidly as an arm encircled his neck, and rammed an elbow into the newcomer's midsection. Then he jerked his head back,

smashing the back of his skull into his opponent's nose.

The hold around his neck weakened, and Wayne tore himself loose from the other's grasp. He jumped to his feet, but the other man was a long way from being unconscious. A stinging right smashed into Wayne's mouth, and he felt the taste of blood. Hastily he wiped the trickle away with the back of his hand.

With his nose pouring blood, Wayne's antagonist charged in. His eyes burned with the strange flame that had been gleaming in Bogg's face out on the desert in the valley. He ploughed into Wayne's stomach with a savage blow that rocked Wayne back.

He grunted and drove back with a flurry of blows. The other aimed a wild blow at Wayne's head; Wayne seized the wrist as the arm flew past his ear, and twisted, hard. The medic flipped through the air and came to rest against the wall with a brief crunching impact. He moaned and then lapsed into silence.

Quickly, Wayne grabbed the gun off the floor and planted his back to the wall, looking around for new antagonists. But there was evidently no one left who cared

to tangle with him, and the four medics strewn out on the floor didn't seem to have much fight left in them.

Wayne crossed the room in a couple of strides and bolted the door. Then he walked over to the box of sand. If it contained what he suspected—

He stepped over to the lab bench and picked out a long steel support rod from the equipment drawer. He placed the rod gently against the sand, and pushed downward, hard. There was a tinny scream, and a six-inch needle shot up instantly through the surface.

"Just what I thought," Wayne murmured. "Can you talk, you nasty little brute?" He prodded into the sand—more viciously this time. There was a flurry of sand, and the football-shaped thing came to the surface, clashing its teeth and screaming shrilly.

Wayne cursed. Then he turned the needle gun back up to full power and calmly burned the thing to a crisp. An odor of singed flesh drifted up from the ashes on the sand.

He stooped and fumbled in Stevelman's pocket, pulling out a ring of keys.

"They better be the right

ones," he told the unconscious medic. Holstering the needle gun, he walked over to the medical stores cabinet, hoping that the things he needed would be inside. He knew exactly what he was facing now, and what he would have to do.

He checked over the labels, peering through the neatly-arranged racks for the substance he was searching for.

Finally he picked a large plastine container filled with a white, crystalline powder. Then he selected a couple of bottles filled with a clear, faintly yellow liquid, and took a hypodermic gun from the rack. He relocked the cabinet.

Suddenly a knock sounded. He stiffened, sucked in his breath, and turned to face the door.

"Who's there?" he asked cautiously, trying to counterfeet Stevelman's voice.

"Harrenburg," said a rumbling voice. "I'm on guard duty. Heard some noise coming from in there a while back, and thought I'd look in. Everything all right, Dr. Stevelman? I mean—"

"Everything's fine, Harrenburg," Wayne said, imitating the medic's thin, dry voice. "We're running some tests on Captain Wayne. They're pretty complicated

affairs, and I'd appreciate it if you didn't interrupt again."

"Sure, sir," the guard said. "Just a routine check, sir. Colonel Petersen's orders. Sorry if I've caused any trouble, sir."

"That's all right," Wayne said. "Just go away and let us continue, will you?"

There was the sound of the guard's footsteps retreating down the corridor. Wayne counted to ten and turned back to the things he had taken from the cabinet.

The bottles of liquid and the hypo gun went into his belt pouch. He tucked the big bottle of white powder under his left arm and cautiously unbolted and opened the door. There was no sign of anyone in the corridor. *Good*, he thought. It was a lucky thing Harrenburg had blundered along just then, and not two minutes later.

He stepped outside the Medic Section and locked the door behind him with the key he'd taken from Stevelman. After turning the needle gun back to low power again in order to keep from killing anyone, he started on tiptoe toward the stairway that led into the bowels of the ship.

After about ten paces, he saw a shadow on the stairway, and cowered in a dark

recess while two crewmen passed, talking volubly. Once they were gone, he came out and continued on his way.

It took quite a while to get where he was going, since it involved hiding and ducking two or three more times along the way, but he finally reached the big compartment where the water repurifiers were. He climbed up the ladder to the top of the reserve tank, opened the hatch, and emptied the contents of the jar into the ship's water supply.

"That ought to do it," he said to himself. Smiling, he carefully smashed the jar and dropped the fragments down the waste chute. He surveyed his handiwork for a moment, then turned and headed back.

He hadn't been seen going down, and he didn't want to be seen going out. If anyone even suspected that he had tampered with the water supply, all they would have to do would be to run the water through the purifiers. That would undo everything Wayne had been carefully preparing.

He made his way safely back up to the main deck and headed through the quiet ship toward the airlock. He wasn't so lucky this time; a guard saw him.

"Where you goin', Cap-

tain?" the guard demanded, starting to lift his gun. "Seems to me you ought to be in the brig, and—"

Wayne made no reply. He brought his gun up in a rapid motion and beamed the man down. The guard toppled, a hurt expression on his face.

Wayne raced to the airlock. He didn't bother with a space-suit—not now, when he knew that the air was perfectly harmless outside. He opened the inner door, closed it, and opened the outer door.

Then, grinning gleefully, he pressed the button that would start the pumping cycle. The outer door started to close automatically, and Wayne just barely managed to get outside and onto the ladder before it clanged shut. As soon as the great hatch had sealed itself, the pumps started exhausting the air from the airlock. No one could open the doors until the pumping cycle was over.

He climbed down the ladder and began walking over toward the western wall. He would have to keep away from the ship for a while, and the rocks were as good a place as any to hide out.

It was dark. Fomalhaut had set, leaving the moonless planet in utter blackness,

broken only by the cold gleam of the stars. The lights streaming from the portholes of the *Lord Nelson* gave a small degree of illumination to the valley.

The valley. It was spread out before him, calm and peaceful, rippling dunes of sand curling out toward the mountains. The valley, he knew, was a betrayer—calm and quiet above, alive with an army of hideous vermin a few feet below its surface.

He started to walk, and moistened his lips. He knew he was going to get awfully thirsty in the next few hours, but there was not the slightest help for it. There hadn't been any way to carry water from the ship.

"I can wait," he told himself. He stared back at the circular bulk of the *Lord Nelson* behind him, and his fingers trembled a little. He had known, when he joined the Corps, that space was full of traps like this one—but this was the first time he had actually experienced anything like this. It was foul.

Something slammed into his boot sole, and this time Wayne knew what it was.

"Persistent, aren't you!" He jerked his foot up. This monster hadn't stuck as the other one had, but he saw the

tip of the needle-beak thrashing around wildly in the loose sand. Wayne thumbed the gun up to full power, and there was a piercing shriek as the gun burned into the sand. There was a sharp shrill sound, and the odor of something burning. He spat.

The little beasts must be all over the floor of the valley! Scurrying frantically, like blood-red giant crabs, sidling up and down beneath the valley, searching upward for things to strike at. How they must hate his metamagnetic boots, he thought!

He kept on walking, expecting to feel the impact of another thrust momentarily, but he was not molested again. *They must be getting wise, he thought. They know they can't get through my boots, and so they're leaving me alone. That way they don't call attention to themselves.*

A new, more chilling question struck him:

Just how smart are they?

He had made it to the wall and was climbing up the treacherous slope when the airlock door opened, and someone stood outlined in the bright circle of light that cut into the inky blackness. An amplified voice filled the valley and ricocheted back off the walls of the mountains,

casting eerie echoes down on the lone man on the desert.

"CAPTAIN WAYNE! THIS IS COLONEL PETERSEN SPEAKING. DON'T YOU REALIZE THAT YOU'RE A SICK MAN? YOU MAY DIE OUT THERE. COME BACK. THAT'S AN ORDER, CAPTAIN. REPEAT: COME BACK. THAT'S AN ORDER!"

"I'm afraid an order from you just doesn't hold much weight for me right now, Captain," Wayne said quietly, to himself. Silently he went on climbing the escarpment, digging into the rough rock.

He kept on climbing until he found the niche for which he had been heading. He dragged himself in and sat down, as comfortably as possible. He began to wait.

Dawn came in less than three hours, as Fomalhaut burst up over the horizon and exploded in radiance over the valley. With dawn came a patrol of men, slinking surreptitiously across the valley, probably with orders to bring him in. Wayne was ensconced comfortably in his little rock niche, hidden from the men in the valley below, but with a perfect view of everything

that went on. The wind whistled around the cliffs, ceaselessly moaning a tuneless song. He felt like standing up and shouting wildly, "Here I am! Here I am!" but he repressed the perverse urge.

The patrol group stood in a small clump in the valley below, seemingly waiting for something. Moments passed, and then it became apparent what that something was. Hollingwood, the metallurgist, appeared, dragging with him the detector. They were going to look for Captain Wayne with it, just as they had searched out the Double-Nucleus Beryllium.

Wayne frowned. It was a possibility he hadn't thought about. They could easily detect the metal in his boots! And he didn't dare take them off; he'd never make it back across that hellish stretch of sand without them. He glanced uneasily at his watch. *How much longer do I have to keep evading them?* he wondered. It was a wearing task.

It looked as though it would be much too long.

The muzzle of the detector began to swing back and forth slowly and precisely, covering the valley inch by inch. He heard their whispered consultations drifting up from be-

low, though he couldn't make out what they were saying.

They finished with the valley, evidently concluding he wasn't there, and started searching the walls. Wayne decided it was time to get out while the getting was good. He crawled slowly out of the niche and wriggled along the escarpment, heading south, keeping low so the men in the valley wouldn't see him.

Unfortunately, he couldn't see them either. He kept moving, hoping they wouldn't spot him with the detector. He wished he had the metamagnetic hand grapples with him. For one thing, the sharp rock outcroppings sliced his hands like so much meat. For another, he could have dropped the grapples somewhere as a decoy.

Oh, well, you can't think of everything, Wayne told himself. He glanced at his watch. How long was it going to take?

He heard the scrape of boot leather on a rock somewhere ahead of him. He glanced up sharply, seeing nothing, and scowled. They had spotted him.

They were laying a trap.

Cautiously, he climbed over a huge boulder, making no sound. There was one man

standing behind it, waiting, apparently, for Wayne to step around into view. He peered down, trying to see who it was. It seemed to be Hollingwood, the dignified, austere metallurgist.

Wayne smiled grimly, picked up a heavy rock, and dropped it straight down, square on the man's helmet. The plexalloy rang like a bell through the clear early-morning air, and the man dropped to his knees, dazed by the shock.

Knowing he had just a moment to finish the job, Wayne pushed off against the side of the rock and plummeted down, landing neatly on the metallurgist's shoulders. The man reeled and fell flat. Wayne spun him over and delivered a hard punch to the solar plexus. "Sorry, Dave," he said softly. The metallurgist gasped and curled up in a tight ball. Wayne stood up. It was brutal, but it was the only place you could hit a man wearing a space helmet.

One down, Wayne thought. Fifty-eight to go. He was alone against the crew—and, for all he knew, against all fifty-nine of them.

Hollingwood groaned and stretched. Wayne bent and, for good measure, took off the

man's helmet and tapped him none too gently on the skull.

There was the sound of footsteps, the harsh *chitch-chitch* of feet against the rock. "He's up that way," he heard a deep voice boom.

That meant the others had heard the rock hitting Hollingwood's plexalloy helmet. They were coming toward him.

Wayne sprang back defensively and glanced around. He hoped there were only five of them, that the rule of six was still being maintained. Otherwise things could become really complicated, as they hunted him relentlessly through the twisted gulleys.

He hated to have to knock out too many of the men; it just meant more trouble later. Still, there was no help for it, if he wanted there to be any later. He thought of the bleached bones of the crew of the *Mavis*, and shuddered.

It was something of an advantage not to be wearing a helmet. Even with the best of acoustical systems, hearing inside a helmet tended to be distorted and dimmed. The men couldn't hear him as well as he could hear them. And since they couldn't hear themselves too well, they made a little more noise than he did.

A space boot came into

view around a big rock, and Wayne aimed his needle-beam at the spot where the man's head would appear.

When the head came around the rock, Wayne fired. The man dropped instantly. *Sorry, friend*, Wayne apologized mentally. *Two down. Fifty-seven to go*. The odds were still pretty heavy.

He knew he had to move quickly now; the others had seen the man drop, and by now they should have a pretty good idea exactly where Wayne was.

He picked up a rock and lobbed it over a nearby boulder, then started moving cat-like in the other direction. He climbed up onto another boulder and watched two men move away from him. They were stepping warily, their beam guns in their hands. Wayne wiped away a bead of perspiration, aimed carefully, and squeezed the firing stud twice.

Four down. Fifty-five to go.

A moment later, something hissed near his ear. Without waiting, he spun and rolled off the boulder, landing cat-like on his feet. Another crewman was standing on top of a nearby boulder. Wayne began to sweat; this pursuit seemed to be indefinitely pro-

longed, and it was beginning to look unlikely that he could avoid them forever.

He had dropped his pistol during the fall; it was wedged between a couple of rocks several feet away.

He heard someone call: "I got him. He fell off the rock. We'll take him back down below."

Then another voice—ominously. "He won't mind. He'll be glad we did it for him—afterwards."

"I'll go get him," said the first voice. The man stepped around the side of the boulder—just in time to have a hard-pitched rock come thunking into his midsection.

"Oof!" he grunted, took a couple of steps backwards, and collapsed.

Five down. Fifty-four to go. It could go on forever this way.

"What's the matter?" asked the man who had replied to the first one with those chilling words.

"Nothing," said Wayne, in a fair imitation of the prosstrate crewman's voice. "He's heavy. Come help me."

Then he reached down and picked up the fallen man's beam gun. He took careful aim.

When the sixth man stepped around the rock, he fired.

The beam went wide of the mark, slowing the other down, and Wayne charged forward. He pounded two swift punches into the amazed crewman, who responded with a woozy, wild blow. Wayne ducked and let the fist glide past his ear, then came in hard with a solid body-blow and let the man sag to the ground. He took a deep breath.

Six down and only fifty-three to go.

He crawled back to the edge of the precipice and peered down into the valley. There was no one to be seen. It was obvious that Colonel Petersen was still enforcing the six-man rule.

As he watched, he saw the airlock door open. A space-suited figure scrambled down the ladder and sprinted across the deadly sand of the valley floor.

It was Sherri! Wayne held his breath, expecting at any moment that one of the little monsters beneath the sand would sink its vicious needle upward into Sherri's foot. But her stride never faltered.

As she neared the precipice, another figure appeared at the airlock door and took aim with a gun.

Wayne thumbed his own

needle-beam pistol up to full and fired hastily at the distant figure. At that distance, even the full beam would only stun. The figure collapsed backwards into the airlock, and Wayne grinned in satisfaction.

Seven down. Fifty-two to go.

He kept an eye on the airlock door and a finger on his firing stud, waiting to see if anyone else would come out. No one else did.

As soon as Sherri was safely up to the top of the precipice, Wayne ran to meet her.

"Sherri! What the devil did you come out here for?"

"I had to see you" she said, panting for breath. "If you'll come back to the ship before they beam you down, we can prove to Colonel Petersen that you're all right. We can show them that the Masters—"

She realized suddenly what she said and uttered a little gasp. She had her pistol out before the surprised Wayne could move.

He stared coldly at the pistol, thinking bitterly that this was a hell of a way for it all to finish. "So they got you too," he said. "That little display at the airlock was a phony. You were sent out here to lure me back into the ship. Just another Judas."

She nodded slowly. "That's right," she said. "We all have to go to the Masters. It is—it—is—is—"

Her eyes glazed, and she swayed on her feet. The pistol wavered and swung in a feeble spiral, no longer pointed at Wayne. Gently, he took it from her nerveless fingers and caught her supple body as she fell.

He wiped his forehead dry. Up above, the sun was climbing toward the top of the sky, and its beams raked the planet below, pouring down heat.

He glanced at his wrist-watch while waiting for his nerves to stop tingling. Sherri must have been the last one—the drug must have taken effect at last, and not a moment too soon. He decided to wait another half hour before he tried to get into the spaceship, just the same.

The huge globe of the *Lord Nelson* stood forlornly in the center of the valley. The airlock door stayed open; no one tried to close it.

Wayne's mouth was growing dry; his tongue felt like sandpaper. Nevertheless, he forced himself to sit quietly, watching the ship closely for the full half hour, before he picked up Sherri, tied his rope around her waist, and

lowered her to the valley floor. Then he wandered around the rocks, collecting the six unconscious men, and did the same for them.

He carried them all, one by one, across the sand, burning a path before him with the needle beam.

Long before he had finished his task, the sand was churning loathsomely with the needles of hundreds and thousands of the monstrous little beasts. They were trying frantically to bring down the being that was so effectively thwarting their plans, jabbing viciously with their upthrust beaks. The expanse of sand that was the valley looked like a pincushion, with the writhing needles ploughing through the ground one after another. Wayne kept the orifice of his beam pistol hot as he cut his way back and forth from the base of the cliff to the ship.

When he had dumped the seven unconscious ones all inside the airlock, he closed the outer door and opened the inner one. There was not a sound from within.

Fifty - nine down, he thought, *and none to go*.

He entered the ship and dashed down the winding staircase to the water purifiers to change the water in the

reservoir tanks. Thirsty as he was, he was not going to take a drink until the water had been cleared of the knockout drug he had dropped into the tanks.

After that came the laborious job of getting everyone in the ship strapped into their bunks for the takeoff. It took the better part of an hour to get all sixty of them up—they had fallen all over the ship—and nestled in the acceleration cradles. When the job was done, he went to the main control room and set the autopilot to lift the spaceship high into the ionosphere.

Then, sighting carefully on the valley far below, he dropped a flare bomb.

"Goodbye, little monsters," he said exultantly.

For a short space of time, nothing happened. Then the viewplate was filled with a deadly blue-white glare. Unlike an ordinary atomic bomb, the flare bomb would not explode violently; it simply burned, sending out a brilliant flare of deadly radiation that would crisp all life dozens of feet below the ground.

He watched the radiation blazing below. Then it began to die down, and when the glare cleared away, all was quiet below.

The valley was dead.

When it was all over, Wayne took the hypodermic gun from his pouch, filled it with the anti-hypnotic drug that he had taken from the medical cabinet, and began to make his rounds. He fired a shot into each and every one aboard. He had no way of knowing who had been injected by the small monsters and who had not, so he was taking no chances.

Then he went to the colonel's room. He wanted to be there when the Commanding Officer awoke.

The entire crew of the *Lord Nelson* was gathered in the big mess hall. Wayne stared down at the tired, frightened faces of the puzzled people looking up at him, and continued his explanation.

"Those of you who were under the control of the monsters know what it was like. They had the ability to inject a hypnotic drug into a human being through a normal space boot with those stingers of theirs. The drug takes effect so fast that the victim hardly has any idea of what has happened to him."

"But why do they do it?" It was Hollingwood, the metallurgist, looking unhappy with a tremendous bruise on

his head where Wayne had clobbered him.

"Why does a wasp sting a spider? It doesn't kill the spider, it simply stuns it. That way, the spider remains alive and fresh so that young wasps can feed upon it at their leisure."

Wayne glanced over to his right. "Lieutenant Jervis, you've been under the effect of the drug longer than any of us. Would you explain what *really* happened when the *Mavis* landed?"

The young officer stood up. He was pale and shaken, but his voice was clear and steady.

"Just about the same thing that almost happened here," Jervis said. "We all walked around the valley floor and got stung one at a time. The things did it so quietly that none of us knew what was going on until we got hit ourselves. When we had all been enslaved, we were ready to do their bidding. They can't talk, but they can communicate by means of nerve messages when that needle is stuck into you."

Nearly half the crew nodded in sympathy. Wayne studied them, wondering what it must have been like. They *knew*; he could only guess.

"Naturally," Jervis went

on, "those who have already been injected with the drug try to get others injected. When everyone aboard the *Mavis* had been stung, they ordered me to take the ship home and get another load of Earthmen. Apparently they like our taste. I had to obey; I was completely under their power. You know what it's like."

"And what happened to the others—the eight men you left behind?" asked Colonel Petersen.

Jervis clenched his teeth bitterly. "They just laid down on the sand—and waited."

"Horrible!" Sherri said.

Jervis fell silent. Wayne was picturing the sight, and knew everyone else was, too—the sight of hordes of carnivorous little aliens burrowing up through the sand and approaching the eight Earthmen who lay there, alive but helpless. Approaching them—and beginning to feed.

Just when the atmosphere began to grow too depressing, Wayne decided to break the spell. "I'd like to point out that the valley's been completely cauterized," he said. "The aliens have been wiped out. And I propose to lead a mission out to reconnoitre for

the Double-Nucleus Beryllium."

He looked around. "MacPherson? Boggs? Manetti? You three want to start over where we left off the last time?"

Sergeant Boggs came up to him. "Sir, I want you to understand that—"

"I know, Boggs," Wayne said. "Let's forget all about it. There's work to be done."

"I'm sorry I misjudged you, Wayne. If it hadn't been for your quick action, this crew would have gone the way of the *Mavis*."

"Just luck, Colonel," Wayne said. "If it hadn't been

for those heavy-soled climbing boots, I'd probably be lying out there with the rest of you right now."

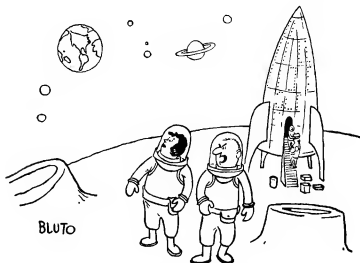
Colonel Petersen grinned. "Thanks to your boots, then."

Wayne turned to his team of three. "Let's get moving, fellows. We've wasted enough time already."

"Do we need spacesuits, sir?" Manetti asked.

"No, Manetti. The air's perfectly fine out there," Wayne said. "But I'd suggest you wear your climbing boots." He grinned. "You never can tell when they'll come in handy."

THE END



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